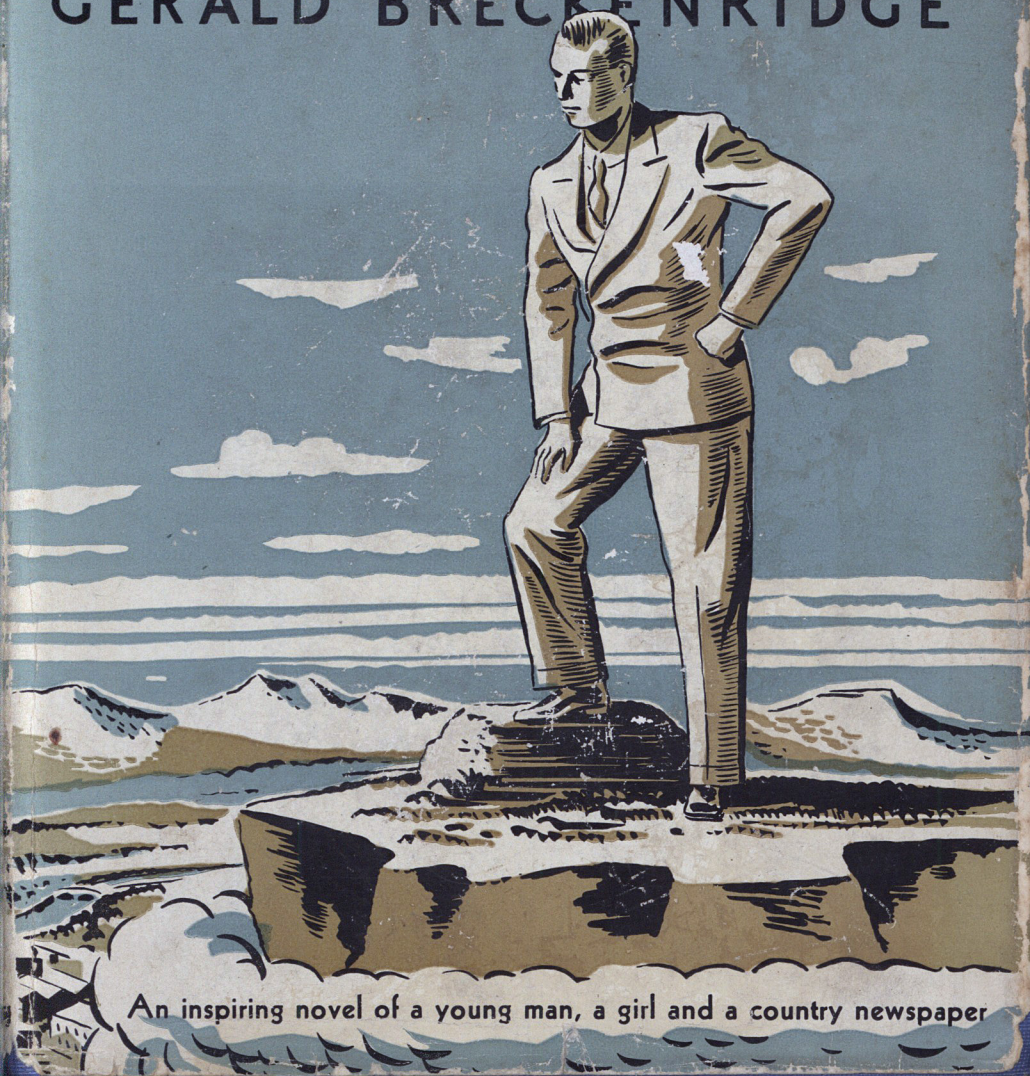


BRIEF KINGDOM

GERALD BRECKENRIDGE



An inspiring novel of a young man, a girl and a country newspaper

Powerful and deeply probing, this is the compact and admirably restrained story of a young man's single-handed effort to defeat the depression. It concerns Jimson Andrews, youthful newspaper man, who, coming from the city to a little Virginia town, buys one of the last hand-set weekly newspapers in America. He plunges into a dramatic battle against time to make the paper take hold before his meagre resources run out; fights grimly against mental hazards of failure. And then he meets a girl, like himself an alien to the countryside; like himself, troubled; and, like himself, possessing valor of spirit. When, in the end, he finally turns back to the city whence he had come, Jimson Andrews is poorer in worldly goods, but richer by far in wealth of emotional experience.

The importance of this book lies far beyond the mere record of dramatic events; it wins its power and distinction by the relation of those events to the shaping and forging of the character of an individual; and by the force of its restraint.

Best in the Green Wood

By Frederick Lambeck

5814
35

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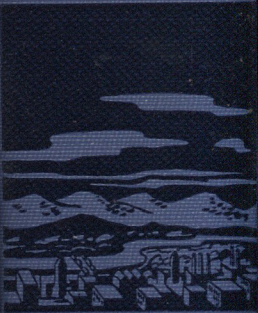
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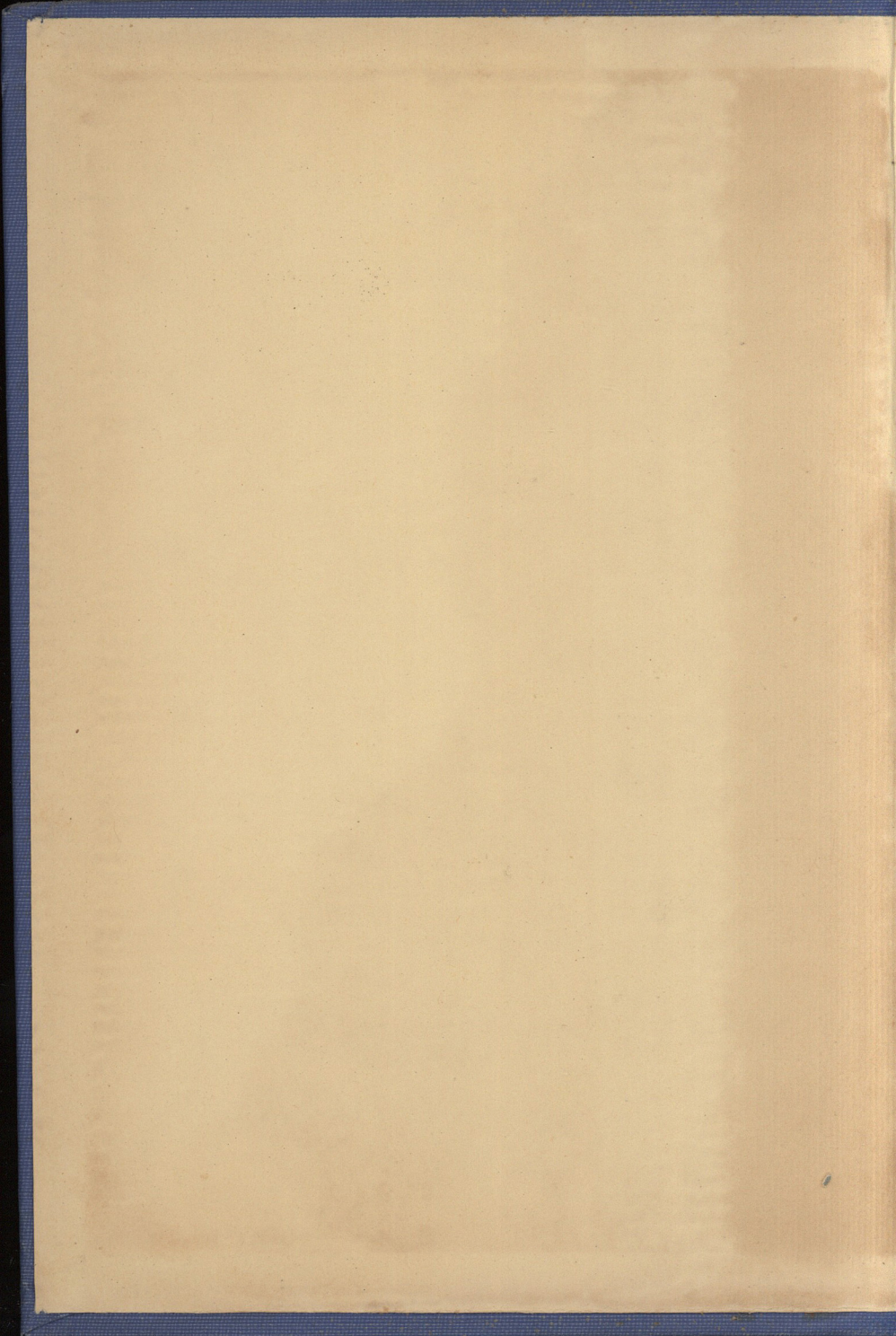
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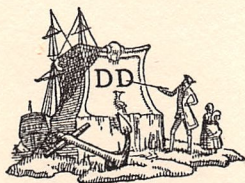
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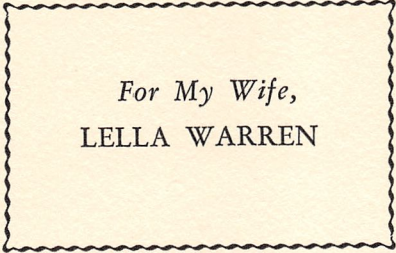


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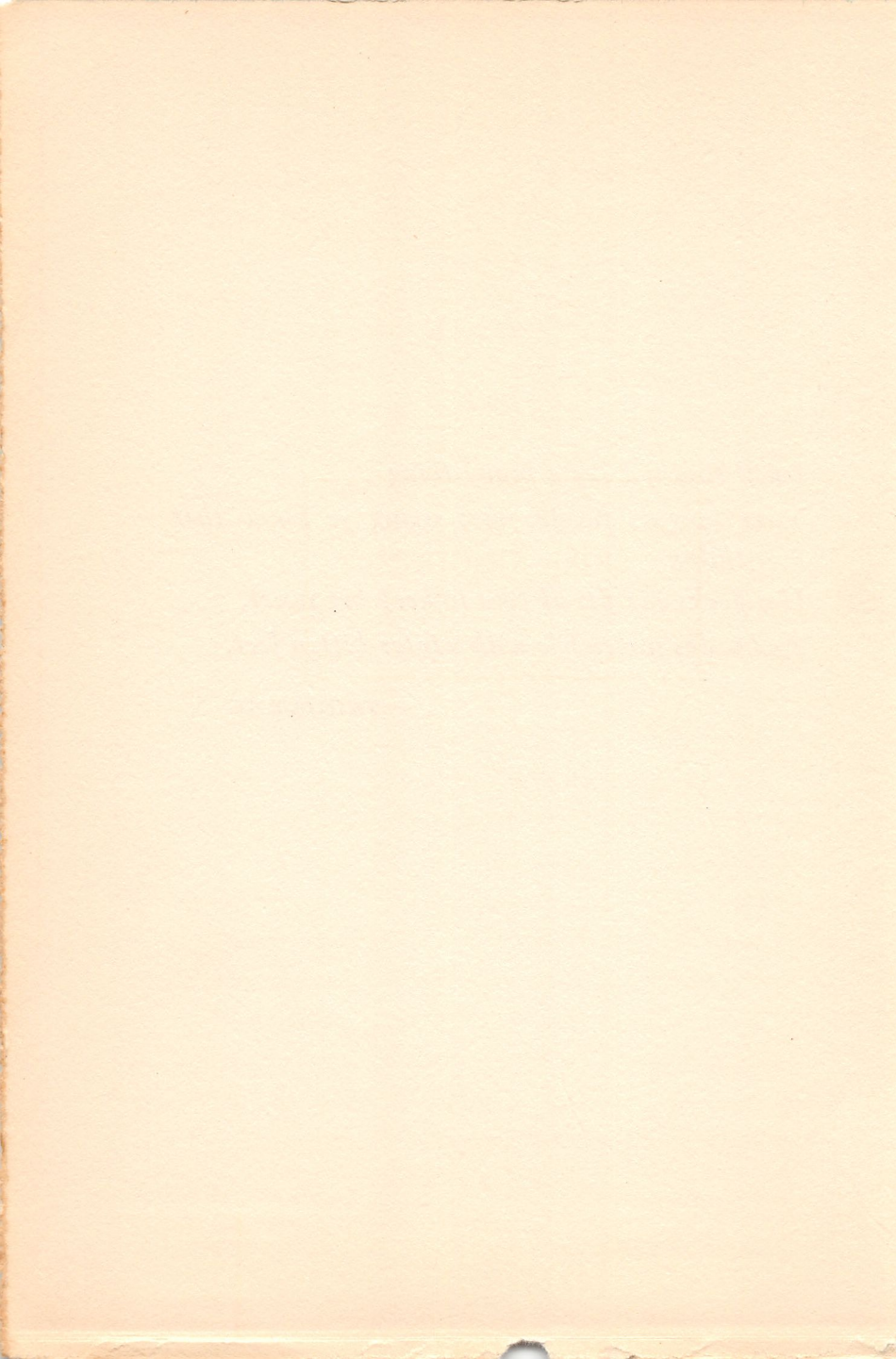
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FIRST EDITION



For My Wife,
LELLA WARREN

*I will that if I say a heavy thing
Your tongues forgive me; seeing ye know that
spring
Has flecks and fits of pain to keep her sweet,
And walks somewhile with winter-bitten feet.*

—SWINBURNE



BRIEF KINGDOM

CHAPTER ONE

Two trains a day stop at Carterville. The others, the fast ones that go hammering their way down the line to Memphis and New Orleans, have their use though, for it is by their passage that the town marks time, knows the beginning and end of the day's toil and the progress of the slow night watches.

I came upon the town as I had pictured it. Having taken the wrong fork twenty miles to the north, I had missed the state highway which draws a raw line past the new brick high school and fleets between two gas stations and a roadside lunch. Instead, I drove in a secondhand Ford roadster along the old dirt road which winds up through the shallow valley, and rattled across the plank bridge spanning the run.

It was Monday, June 18, 1934. Noonday heat lay so heavily over the gentle Virginia hillside that all life seemed crushed to a stillness like paralysis

or death. Only beside the tracks the Carterville Milling Company raised its thin "phut-phut phut-phut" that I was to learn comprised the very heart-beat of the place. When it stopped the town would die.

I had glimpsed the town first over treetops—two wooden church steeples, the grade-school belfry and the weathered false front of the one three-story building. From that angle, it looked indeed like a place where Tom Sawyer might have lived, and I exulted.

But now, on topping the rise from the creek, the mirage was dispelled. Here was the single unlovely main street, treeless, flanked by a score of 1912-type business buildings, not old, not picturesque, merely drab. Twenty-two years ago, if I had known it, a great fire had swept this street, taking with it the trees which sheltered older and more serene structures.

I had prepared myself for the worst, of course, yet I had driven the length of the street blithely before realizing I had come through the town already and was leaving it. At the new highway I turned the car and came back, involuntarily racing the motor in neutral—I had been driving fast since

leaving Washington three hours before. The exhaust was unexpectedly loud, but it awakened no sign of life in the brick bank, nor in the grocery and hardware and dry-goods stores, hiding behind dust-coated display windows.

Two young men in overalls, their faces already stamped in some harsh cast, were sitting on a bread-box in front of the produce exchange, the only persons in sight. They stared, and I knew I shouldn't have worn a white linen suit and freshly cleaned panama. I knew better than to ask them where to find Mayor Bixby—they wouldn't answer. Silently, without a word to each other, they watched me stop the car a few feet away and climb out.

Across the street was the drugstore, and I almost ran through its screen door to escape the pitiless exposure of that noontime. Inside, the damp gloom and faintly antiseptic odor recalled at once drug-stores I had known as a boy, the marble counters I used to love to touch for their chill. Now, blinking after the sun and the wind-clamoring drive, my head swam, bells clanged, like a bilious attack. Somewhere an electric fan droned. Then I found the man just at my elbow, watching me.

He was a fat man, and the immediate impression of his folded flesh and small eyes was that he waited always for others to act, knowing he would in the end gain by their inevitable misstep. His bulk bent a spindle-legged iron chair. He wore a wrinkled seersucker suit, the top trouser buttons undone to ease the dome of his stomach. He was smoking a cigar and drinking Coca-cola through a straw simultaneously.

I said, "Excuse me, sir, can you tell me where I might find Mayor Bixby?"

The man kept on sipping his drink, giving no sign that he had heard. "Wight heah," he said finally.

I said, "How do you do, Mr Bixby, I'm Jimson Andrews. I wrote you from New York about the paper, you know."

"Yehwus." He pulled at the straw, sucking up the last of the drink. I saw that it had not occurred to him that I expected to shake hands. "W-well," he said, getting to his feet, "gu-guess we might's w-well go crosso to my owffice, s-son."

I almost laughed. The mayor not only was tongue-tied, his voice was piping as a child's. As I followed him into the street, I became conscious

of my height beside his. It seemed indecent to be sticking up so tall in that little street, and I had an absurd impulse to walk hunching myself down to the town's level.

We entered a boxlike frame structure with a notary public's plate on the door. The mayor squeezed himself between the arms of a swivel chair, with his back to a roll-top desk. I sat, uninvited, in the only other chair, a straight one. It was ten degrees hotter here than in the drugstore.

The mayor bit the end of a fresh cigar. I knew he was studying me, and I thought I could follow his ponderous conclusions—I had encountered this before. The mayor had expected, from the tone of my letters, a man to take over the weekly paper. Now here was a youth—no, a mere boy. I was twenty-three, but to him, no doubt, I didn't look more than sixteen or seventeen, no older than the gangling youths of the town who loafed in the late afternoon by the station and laughed among themselves when a woman skipped across the tracks. As he continued to stare with an obvious distrust of my age, I almost blurted out, "Yes, I know my nose is small, but that doesn't mean I can't *do* anything."

I felt he would wait indefinitely for me to speak. Finally I said, "How many people did you say there are in this town?"

"Five hundwed."

"You'd never guess it."

"Yehwus?"

"Let's get down to business, Mr Bixby," I said. "I want to get settled today and be ready to take hold of the paper tomorrow."

"All wight, s-son." He still waited.

I drew out my pocketbook. It seemed up to me to make a gesture of good faith. . . . Perhaps this would keep him from calling me "son" again.

"I'll be frank with you," I said. "I have only a hundred dollars to give you as a down payment on the twelve hundred you are asking for the *Piedmont Herald*. As for the monthly installments of thirty-five dollars, I hope to earn them out of the paper. Therefore, instead of signing a contract I'd like simply to operate on a gentleman's agreement, whereby I'll either meet the payments each month or hand the paper back to you and forfeit whatever I've put into it. That way you'll have nothing to lose, as the paper is defunct now anyway. Doesn't that seem fair enough?"

The mayor flipped his cigar ash languidly, a gesture almost like a fat woman's. Suddenly I knew his eyes were on the five twenty-dollar bills which I had laid on his desk. "W-well, I gu-guess that will be all wight. I w-will just give you a weceipt for this cash."

He fumbled laboriously among some papers. Then his pen began to scratch, audibly against the faint, petulant sputter of the mill nearby. I was afraid he might stop writing, change his mind. After all, it seemed incredible to buy a newspaper, no matter how small, for that price.

On the desk a cheap alarm clock ticked. . . . Thirty-eight minutes past twelve, I noted, and the great adventure was about to begin. Here, in this room in the Piedmont of Virginia, the drifting bark neared the trade winds. The wasted years (ever since I was twelve and joined the Boy Scouts), the years of frenzy as the days and months went passing by without any mark of mine upon them, were about to end. Now I would rule the hours, marshaling them to my command. The starter raised his gun, the runner strained at the mark, the cry was on the air, "Go!"

Bunk! . . . I almost said it aloud. The mayor

started at my sharp laugh, and I coughed quickly. "Excuse me, sir, a summer cold," I said.

I pocketed the receipt without reading it. We shook hands, a limp, brief clasp. "I hope you make owut all wight," the mayor said doubtfully.

"Oh, I will, don't worry," I said. I pushed open the screen door but had to turn, laughing and shaking my head, as though I knew I was the biggest fool on earth. "I almost forgot, but it might be a good idea if you told me where to find my new office," I said.

In front of the produce exchange half a dozen youths now lounged. Behind the plate-glass window of the grocery and general merchandise store two girls watched. A man's figure shadowed the screen door of the dry-goods store. . . . So the town knew I had arrived. Let it!

Along the dirt road, facing the tracks, straggled half a dozen frame houses, needing paint, tree-shaded, blending into the brown hummocks of grass about them and into the background of tall yellow weeds and the pattern of fields upon a far hillside. Past the last house, squatting in the middle of a field where the weeds grew halfway up its

walls, was an oblong cement structure with a flat tin roof. No road led to its door, though the ground had been flattened into a trace of ruts. To one side of the building was a blackened heap of tin cans and ashes of newspapers.

It was a woebegone shack. Yet as I eased the car across the field, I was picturing it already with the weeds cut down, a neat driveway bordered with flowers and perhaps a gold-leaf sign over the door: THE PIEDMONT HERALD, Jimson Andrews, Prop.

The door stood open. Surprised, I found a placid-faced young woman regarding me over a case of type propped at an angle on the editor's desk. There was about her large brown eyes a suggestion of cheerful acceptance of all misfortune. She was generously built, fat, but not offensively so. She was in her early thirties, I guessed. Some strands of her hair, which was tied in a knot, had come loose and fallen across her forehead. Now she brushed them back, leaving a smudge of printer's dust against the thick white skin.

"Hello," I said, "they didn't tell me anyone was here."

She smiled, a smile that grew wider and made her face almost beautiful. It was the first smile I had

seen in that town. "Oh yes, Poppa's here. He's working in the back room."

"Your father . . ."

"If you want some printing done, I'm sure Poppa will be glad to accommodate you. Just walk in and talk to him yourself."

I thought for a moment. . . . Bixby naturally would leave me to deal with the old printer and his daughter, dispossess them or hire them. I had asked him no questions, he had told me no lie. He merely waited.

The back room was gloomy. Boxes, piles of old newsprint, junk of every description climbed the walls and obscured the windows. A single swathe of sunlight cut across the cement floor from the double doors which were open to the field in the rear. There was a steady clanking noise, and in one corner I made out the figure of an old thin man, feeding a job press.

I had to shout before he heard me. Then, with a deliberate precision very like the rhythm of the slapping, ragged belt which drove the small machine, he snapped off the electric motor and waited for the press to coast to a halt. As he came toward me, I saw that he dragged one leg rheumatically.

He must have been well past sixty. His face was gaunt, emaciated. And yet there was a hint of spirit in it. Certainly it was not the face of a broken old man, though it might have been without the protection of a sandy mustache.

"I hate to interrupt your work," I said, and somehow I felt guilty.

He peered at me through spectacles tied to one ear with a bit of dirty string—the support had been broken off. "Well, now I'll tell you, young man, I don't like to talk about m'self, but you're a stranger and I guess you want some kind of printin' done. Now if you ask any of the folks around these parts, I believe they'll tell you old man Grover can do as good job work as you'll get for the money. Course, I ain't sayin' I got the equipment Wally Peck's got over to Culpeper. But I like to take my time and take pains, and when I finish a job in this shop, you may be sure it's going to be done right. . . . What was it you wanted? Some letterheads maybe?"

We were standing beside a homemade, stone-topped table which was littered with a thousand tiny bits of type, bent leads, broken rules. Despite the heat, the old printer was wearing a battered

black felt hat and a shiny black coat that had long since lost its relation to a suit of clothes. His collar was buttoned, and he wore a ragged string of a black tie which had gotten twisted around to one side.

Now he fished a crumpled sack of tobacco from his pocket and started to roll a cigarette, licking the thin paper to make it stick. It was a gesture I was to come to know well. On the instant, it suggested a makeshift print shop in one of the raw West Virginia towns of the eighties, say, the printer-editor working in baggy trousers stuffed into jack boots, hat over his eyes, squinting at a stick of hand-set type through the smoke of a wet, drooping cigarette.

"When you stand in front of a job press on a hot day and when you're gettin' on in years, like I am, it makes you a little dizzy," old man Grover said, matter-of-factly, and he took off his glasses and slowly rubbed his eyes.

I found I couldn't meet his eyes. I glanced around the room, wondering how I was to tell him that he was master no longer of this little kingdom. There was, I noted with dismay, no linotype machine. When I had talked with Mayor Bixby it had

not occurred to me that there might be a completely hand-set newspaper still in existence.

Finally I said, "Mr Grover, I'd like to talk to you about some business."

He nodded and, limping, led the way into the front room. There the sun glinted on unpainted pine racks which contained case upon case of type of all sizes. The shoulder-high racks occupied most of the room, save for a little space around the desk which stood under an open window. The printer glanced at his daughter. "Virgie," he said, "you go on back to the house now. You done enough for one day."

"Yes, Poppa." Although Virgie was a grown woman, she answered her father in a child's tone. It was laughable in one way and in another perfectly natural—the old printer seemed to have witnessed so much that was new grow old and pass into memory with the years.

I seated myself in the editor's swivel chair. Grover stood by a rack of type, tossing a handful of loose letters back into their boxes. He had, I was to learn, a lifetime habit that would not allow him to waste time.

"Mr Grover," I said, "I'm going to help you run the paper."

"I guess you'd have to talk to Mayor Bixby about that."

"I have talked to him. I'm buying the paper."

For half a minute the steady "chunk-chunk" of the type dropping into the cases ceased. The drone of bees in the hayfield beyond the window was faintly audible. Then the old man started throwing in type again.

Already I had realized that, without a linotype machine, his services would be indispensable. So far as I knew, there might not be another hand-set printer in that part of the country. I was trying to be diplomatic. "I want you to think of the paper as being as much yours as mine," I went on. "I hope we can work together on it."

"Seems to me that's what the last editor said." He spoke in a low, tired voice, as though he didn't care whether I heard him or not.

"I don't know anything about the last editor," I said, "and I don't see what that has to do with my proposal."

"He left here owing me three months' pay."

"How does it happen you're here?" I asked.

"Mayor Bixby has been lettin' me use the shop to do job printin'. I kind of look after things for him."

I watched the old man's efficient, ink-stained hands. . . . I couldn't blame him for distrusting me. Yet I couldn't promise him a definite wage until I found out what, if anything, the paper was going to earn. Finally I said, nervously, "Well, how about it, Mr Grover?"

Again the click of falling type stopped. "Now I'll tell you what I think. Course, it's none o' my business, and you know what you're doin', but I've seen 'em come and go here. I been here twelve years now, and I've seen twice that many editors come and go. None of 'em could make a success out of runnin' a paper here. Job printin's all right. One man can get along if he don't have no overhead. But I'm going to tell you out and out, this town just ain't the place for no paper. It seems like the people here don't want it, even if you give it to 'em. They ain't never paid up their subscriptions, and they ain't never goin' to. If I was a young man like you, believe me, I'd get out of this awful place and go to the city, where a man can make a livin' without workin' himself to death."

I lighted a cigarette. This, I told myself, was

only what I had been prepared for when I quit a job in New York, with barely a hundred and fifty dollars in my pocket and in the face of the protests of friends and their predictions of sure failure.

"Mr Grover," I said, a little oratorically, "they say there's a depression on and that there's no use trying to start a business. My friends tell me big business, the big corporations, have everything under control. But I don't believe it. I'm tired of working for someone else. I've got some ideas of my own, and I'd like to try 'em out. I don't see why if a man is willing to work hard and sell his product and his ideas for whatever they're worth—not try to get rich at someone else's expense—why he can't make a living. Now I think, if you will work with me, that we'll be able to make this paper a little more interesting to people than it has been in the past. Anyway, I'm going to find out whether they'll respond, or whether there is *no use trying*."

The old printer dropped his cigarette to the floor and slowly turned his heel on it. I was slightly embarrassed about what I had said, for I could see that it had meant nothing to him. I suppose I had spoken as I had simply because my mind had been running along those lines during the drive from New York,

phrasing what I had planned as my first editorial.

"Well, it ain't any call of mine to go tellin' you your business," the printer said. "If you want to treat me square, I'll work for your interests."

"But that's not quite the idea," I told him. "I want you to be a partner in this thing."

He threw in the last piece of type which he had in his hand and started toward the door, as though the conversation were finished. His complete indifference annoyed me, and I said rather testily, "What's the matter with that? I'm only trying to give you the best break I can."

"If it's all the same to you," he said, "I'd rather draw my pay every Saturday. Twelve dollars a week would be about right for me. Virgie usually gets eight. You'll have to have her, too, if you can't set type yourself."

"Why wouldn't you rather have a small interest in the paper and take a percentage of its earnings?" I asked curiously.

"When you got a wife and daughter and two or three grandchildren to look out for, twelve dollars a week looks a lot better than having your name in the paper for bein' a editor or stockholder or some-thin'."

"All right," I said, as confidently as I could, "I'll pay you twelve a week and your daughter eight. We'll start things moving the first thing tomorrow." Then I added, "And I think we're going to get out a paper that will surprise this town, Mr Grover!"

He went off across the field with my last words trailing after him. I knew later that to him, out of the depths of his disillusion, they were merely that—words.

After he had gone and as the long afternoon wore on, I sat in the dusty, cluttered little shop, thinking and getting the feel of property. I didn't need anyone to tell me I had gone out on the end of a limb, so to speak. Still, when I had planned the venture back in New York, I had thought it would be better to act quickly, rather than think of all the objections and finally give up the idea altogether. I had, in the past, listened to the play-safes, allowing one fine plan after another to become sour. Now to hell with 'em. . . .

I put my feet up on the scarred desk and was delighted at how completely out of place my long legs in white trousers and my sport shoes looked.

No doubt that desk had never seen a pair of shoes like these. Well, I was the editor now. At least, nobody was going to tell me where to put my feet.

After a while I got up and moved around the place, picking up a piece of type and letting it fall back into its box, smacking a lead rule into the palm of my hand, idly twisting the wheel of the massive iron paper cutter that crouched in one corner. What long-forgotten events, what poignant tales of human destiny had this antique equipment helped to record?

I went into the "composing room" and studied the iron flat-bed press which occupied half the room. I discovered that it had been operated originally by a huge crank, turned by a sweating Negro perhaps. Now a geared wheel and leather belt to an electric motor did the work. Somewhere on the iron frame I found the date of its manufacture—1874! It was then, I believe, that I began to love that shop and every outmoded fixture in it. Why, this press might easily have printed the first newspaper in that part of Virginia!

I leaned against the doorjamb and looked across the tracks to a yellowing hillside. A boy with a stick in his hand was trailing two cows across the

crest at that moment. His figure was silhouetted against the hazy sky. One of the through trains from Washington whistled up the line a way, and then it pounded past, making the whole shop tremble. Trains usually gave me a nostalgia to be off and away, but this time I felt myself grinning and had an impulse to thumb my nose at it. Just then I wouldn't have been anywhere else in the world.

CHAPTER TWO

THE Bolton family got up early. My window was dark when I heard steps on the uncarpeted stairs of the rambling old house, a door slamming downstairs and the squeak of the pump in the back yard.

I didn't know when I had fallen asleep or when I had waked, so tumultuous had been the night. Once, as I deliberately tried to still the wild plans that whirled through my head, I began to itch, first on the arms, then the legs, then everywhere. I rose and turned back the clean, starched sheet, but there wasn't a trace of a bedbug. The itching stopped when I turned on the light, but when I was lying in the dark it began again. Finally I knew it was simply nervousness that pricked my body. I had to laugh at myself, thinking that I hadn't felt this way since the night before Christmas a long time ago.

I had eaten supper with the Boltons, noticing them only vaguely—a solid, inarticulate son, three wan girls just out of high school, and a wiry,

prematurely worn woman who sought to obliterate herself in serving her husband and lending weight to his infrequent utterances. Mr Bolton, I had learned, owned the grocery store in town. His daughters helped to operate it.

Now I ate breakfast alone in the bare, ugly dining room, Mrs Bolton serving me. There was hot oatmeal, two eggs fried in grease, sausage, cold biscuits.

"I certainly hope you'll like our town. We certainly need a *good* editor here." Mrs Bolton hovered in the door to the kitchen, smiling, anxious to please.

"Yes," I said, making a mental resolve to talk with her—someday when I didn't have so much to do. As I hurried out of the house, the night was fading rapidly and the dawn coolness already was giving way to the blazing day to follow. A rooster crowed loudly across the sleeping town.

I pushed open the door of the shop and reached for the hanging light bulb. At once, the already familiar fixtures leaped up to greet me.

"Now," I thought, "where shall we begin?"

I lifted a case of type off the desk and shoved it

in a rack. Then I started gathering up piles of yellowed papers, old advertising posters, cardboard boxes. I carried them into the field, struck a match and watched the bonfire blaze up. Inside, I found the remains of an old broom and began sweeping the cement floor. Even after that the chaos of the place hardly seemed to have been dented.

It struck me as strange that any so-called newspaper could be without a typewriter, until I remembered that most country editors were printers first and editors only at odd moments. They wrote few articles themselves, making up their papers of the social notes and publicity handouts sent to the office. Of course, I had decided to write or rewrite every line that went into this paper. I got my portable typewriter out of the car, which I had left in front of the shop during the night, and placed it in the middle of the desk. It was full daylight now. I switched off the light and sat at the desk, smoking and wondering what to do next.

After a while I began idly opening drawers. They were crammed with all manner of papers, letters and bills. As I glanced at some of them, a picture began to take shape:

January 20, 1933.

Mr H. K. Simmons,
Editor, Piedmont Herald,
Carterville, Virginia.

Dear Sir: We find you are two months in arrears on your light bill. If you cannot remit \$13.48 at once, we will be forced to discontinue service. This is a third and final notice. . . .

Another read:

Unless you can pay something on your overdue account, we will be unable to send you further shipments of newsprint. . . .

Still another:

We are not interested in advertising in your paper now or at any time in the future, as we do not believe the business from your territory warrants it. . . .

Finally there was:

Dear Hank: I want you to know that I am fully cognizant of what you are facing these lean winter

months, with a wife and three young children dependent on you. It grieves me, therefore, to have to tell you that I cannot advance you any more money. The fact is, I simply haven't got it myself. . . .

Then there were his own business letters, pathetically high-sounding:

Gentlemen: The Piedmont Herald circulates in one of the most prosperous farming territories in the state of Virginia. One trial of our advertising medium will, we believe, show an immediate result. Why not give us that trial?

I stuffed the letters back into the drawer with a guilty feeling. All the excitement of that first day suddenly had gone. I saw that other man who had sat at this desk, despairing. I tried to picture him as an incompetent nincompoop who had no business editing a newspaper. I pulled out another drawer, hoping to find something to bolster this explanation. My eye fell on a sheaf of copy paper with this written on top: "The Murder on the Stairs": A Novel, by H. K. Simmons.

I started to scan the lines. There were two sheets, typewritten, and then, midway down the third sheet, the lines ended, bitten off in the middle of a sentence. . . . So, then, this man—this one, too—had hoped and planned and perhaps . . .

"Hell!" I slammed the drawer shut and stood up. Old man Grover, I saw, was coming across the field, walking slowly and stiffly, his shoulders stooped a little, his head poked forward, dragging one leg. "Good morning, Mr Grover," I called as he drew near. "Looks like another scorcher, eh?"

He half nodded and walked past me into the back room. I followed and found him already fumbling with the mess of loose type on the stone table. "Must get this cleaned up if you want to get out a paper," he mumbled.

He picked up a handful of type and began methodically distributing it into the letter boxes. Watching him, I felt a little sick at the stomach. At this rate, it would take a week merely to get the type back in the proper cases. The printer couldn't begin setting up a paper until that was done.

"Didn't they ever have a typesetting machine here?" I asked.

"No, sir. Mr Simmons used to talk about gettin' one, and the salesman came around and all, but Mr Simmons couldn't raise the money for it. He was always talkin' big, but he never done anything like he said he was going to." Grover shuffled back to the stone for another handful of type. "Ho, that salesman tried to tell me you could set prettier type on the machine, but after he found out Mr Simmons couldn't buy one, why, he came back and admitted I was right about things. Them machines are all right, I guess, but they'll never do as good as the old hand-set printers, now you mark my words."

"That's right, Mr Grover," I said, kidding him a little, "you stick to the old craft." Somehow the old printer had cheered me up. I told him I was going to Fredericksburg to sell ads and that I'd appreciate it if he would get as much type thrown in as possible, so that we could go to press later in the week.

He slapped his palm on the stone. "You don't need to worry about me. I worked like a dog all my life and I'll go on workin' till they call me Up Yonder. I'm goin' to do the best I can for you, and more than that no man can do."

I said, "Thanks, that's all I want you to do," and went out to the car.

I had decided to go to Fredericksburg, thirty-five miles away, because Mr Bolton had told me flatly that most of the Carterville merchants wouldn't advertise. They thought they'd get all the local trade anyhow. Mr Bolton had offered to take a small ad himself, saying he believed in "modern business methods," but I had refused the offer. I knew he wouldn't have made it if I hadn't been living in his house, and I didn't want charity. I was going to *make* those Carterville merchants advertise. They'd find out their mistake after the farmers began trading in Fredericksburg, by George!

Driving fast along the dirt road, I tried to think of a sales talk. I had never before tried to sell anything when my living depended on it, and I thought of selling as an ordeal. To some men it was supposed to be a game. Well, if they could play it and win, so could I. . . .

The car rattled gaily across the narrow iron bridge spanning the Rappahannock. Fredericksburg sat cleanly upon the left bank, contemplating its historical past. In this little city, the chief reason

for patronizing any merchant was that one's father and, often enough, grandfather had dealt with the firm. The main street had been widened recently, but the old trees, which might have sheltered the crinoline gown and the ranks of gray, remained. Downtown, cars were parked at an angle to the curb. A buggy waited before the modern Princess Anne Hotel.

I parked the car and sat for a while in the hot, midmorning sun, trying to decide which store to solicit first. I knew I was stalling. Finally I approached the nearest one. Three men were sitting on camp chairs in the doorway. "How do you do," I said. "Where can I find the manager, please?"

They studied me slowly. "What do you want to see him about?"

"About some advertising."

They were silent again, watching me. Why, I wondered, did all the men in this section watch and wait so? Had no one ever told them they were being downright rude? But I knew. This was American business, the Coolidge caution.

"Well, son, I don't think we'd be interested. We got too much advertisin' now." The speaker began to smile, though not with his eyes. The two men

sitting on the other side of the doorway chuckled.

"But, sir," I persisted, "won't you at least let me tell you about my paper? I'm the new editor at Carterville. Now, I know Carterville is a small town, but we have a mailing list of two thousand farmers in three counties up that way, and you could get a lot of trade from them, I should think."

"You got two thousand *paid up* subscribers?"

I gulped, "Well, no, sir. You see, that paper's been allowed to lapse for a year, so I'm going to send all the former subscribers free copies for the first month or so before putting on a circulation drive."

The man had stopped smiling. His seriousness mocked me. "I can see you're a business man, all right."

One of the others, a fat man, started a high-pitched laugh, "Hee-hee hee-hee." He slapped his thigh and rocked forward in the chair.

I knew I couldn't afford to lose my temper. I turned and walked away. I walked around the block, watching the proprietors of the small stores lounging in doorways, blinking in the sun, apparently unworried by the lack of business. Apparently they all waited to laugh at someone's expense.

"What's the use in puttin' a ad in when half of them farmers can't read anyway?" said one, and again it was, "Hee-hee hee-hee."

By noon I had canvassed all the stores in the main block. I went back to the car and tried to think of a different approach. A good salesman could sell anything, even a gold brick. But what if one wasn't cut out for a salesman?

I took out my pocketbook and counted the money I had left—thirty-four dollars and some change. If I chucked the whole business and hurried back to New York, my old job might be open. I knew if I couldn't sell ads, there would be no use getting out a paper. The more I thought, the less able I was to make a decision.

Two girls walked along the sidewalk, their high heels clicking in the dozing, nearly deserted street. They wore starched summer dresses and were barelegged. One of them carried a blue parasol. . . . I thought of a girl—I couldn't remember her name—whom I had met at a party the night before I left New York. I had started telling her of my plans. Oh yes, I was going to be a substantial citizen soon, no longer a roving parasite on civilization. Suddenly she had started to laugh. "God, how you

newspaper men talk! But you never do anything," she had said.

I got out of the car and slammed the door.

The manager of the laundry was a young man. When he saw me waiting at the counter he came forward briskly.

"Do your wagons go through Fauquier County?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. What can we do for you?"

"Have you much business up there?" I asked, playing the interested customer.

"Yes, almost all of our trade is up that way. We pick up laundry twice a week in the little towns."

Then I launched into my sales talk, talking so fast he couldn't interrupt, pointing out that if he had some business there he could get more. "Those people are getting sore because you take money out of the town and don't put any into it," I told him. I knew most business men thought of the farmer as a child whose whims, no matter how absurd, had to be catered to. Finally I had said all I could think of, and I waited anxiously, watching his face.

He didn't laugh, as I had half expected. Instead

he said: "You may be right, but I can't squeeze any more advertising on my budget. I'm over the limit now."

"Listen," I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do for you." (Where had I heard a salesman use that line? I almost laughed in the middle of the sentence.) "I'll sell you three half-page ads at less than cost. What would you say to three successive half-pages for ten dollars?"

"How much?" He looked as though he doubted my honesty. "You'll lose money at that rate."

"I know it," I said, "but I want you to see what the ads will do for you. Later, of course, I'll have to raise the rate. By coming in on the ground floor, you see, you're going to have a big advantage over the others."

More sales talk, I thought, but it seemed to be working. "Another thing," I went on, "I'm trying out a theory. I'm not out to clean up a big profit. As long as I can make enough to live on, I'll be satisfied. It seems to me if all business men worked on that basis and co-operated with each other, there wouldn't be a depression."

The man was young, almost as young as I, and he, too, seemed intense about his job. "I'll tell you,

brother," he said, "I'll give you a break. You can run my three ads, starting this week."

"Thanks," I said, "thanks, pal."

"Yeah, I know." He looked puzzled for a moment, and then he started to smile. "I wish you luck."

But when I got in the car, I felt a little guilty. Had I sold him something he didn't really need and couldn't afford? But, what the hell, this was 1934, the fourth year of the depression. This was no time to be leaning over backwards ethically. This was the year when every man had to look out for himself.

I went back to the same merchants I'd canvassed during the morning, and by using new tactics and emphasizing that the laundry thought enough of my paper to "contract" for three half-pages, managed to sell four or five more sizable ads, though the prices were ridiculously low.

Still, as I raced back to Carterville, I felt triumphant. At least, I wasn't going to have to face old man Grover empty-handed. The job of putting out the paper on time—and I had assured every merchant it would appear Friday morning—seemed easy by comparison.

CHAPTER THREE

THURSDAY we went to press. When I came into the shop at daybreak, Grover already was hard at work. He was still throwing in type. The stone was only half cleared. "Have you thrown in enough to start setting yet?" I asked, and he nodded.

I unfolded the dummies of the ads I had sold in Fredericksburg. The old printer rolled a cigarette as he leaned forward to peer at the layouts, spilling a little tobacco on them. "You want these set up today?"

"Naturally."

"Um-m-m. Now I'll tell you out and out what I think, Mr Andrews." (I was learning that Grover always prefaced his remarks with this preamble.) "Now it just looks to me like they ain't no use in us killin' ourselves to get out a paper today."

"We're going to try darn hard," I said, a little sharply.

The printer poked at the sheets of paper. "It 'd

be different if you could set type. Now, Mr Simons could set type real good. But you can't expect one man to set up all the ads and the readin' matter as well, all in one day."

I knew he was right. "Well, Mr Grover," I said, "I don't pretend to be a printer, but maybe I can help a little. Suppose you tackle the reading matter, and I'll try and set up these ads."

"And how can you do that? You don't even know the letter boxes!"

"Confound it, I can learn," I told him savagely.

I had worked until after midnight the night before, writing editorials, bits of news that had drifted into the office, feature stories, even a column—enough, I hoped, to fill the paper. Now I handed Grover the sheaf of copy. He half shrugged and picked up his stick. After a while Virgie came in, and she and the old man began to set up all I had written, letter by letter, word by word, line by line, a seemingly interminable job.

In the back room I studied the ads. At first I couldn't make any headway. But I wasn't unfamiliar with a composing room, and eventually I began to find the right cases of type, the ancient cuts that were used time after time to illustrate

furniture and clothing ads, the odd lengths of rules and borders that had to be pieced together with the utmost patience. Suddenly I thought of a union printer named Mike whom I had known on a city paper. Mike complained bitterly if the rule case was empty, or if the make-up editor changed his mind and revised the page. Mike would have taken one look at this ancient, makeshift shop and walked out in disgust. I had to laugh, thinking of Mike and his temperament.

By noon I had managed to get the half-page laundry ad set up on the stone. I made a proof of it and showed it to old man Grover with some pride. He looked at it gravely. "Why, that's all right," he said. "I guess you're a printer, after all."

Virgie was laughing, and I asked her what was so funny. Her big body shook. "You certainly *look* like a printer," she cried.

I looked down at my clothes. My white shirt and pants were covered with printer's dust and grease. My hands were black, and I knew my face must be, too.

"Oh, Lord!" I began to laugh with Virgie. Then old man Grover joined in with a high-pitched cackle. We hooted and shouted until the shop rang.

I pushed the old printer and he pushed me. In that moment, it occurred to me that a spirit was being born between us three which might make a dead, half-forgotten country newspaper come alive.

Grover and Virgie went home for lunch, and I started another ad. I was too excited to be hungry. Setting the first ad had been a new experience; this one was sheer drudgery. It was exasperating to have to hunt all over the shop, poking in boxes and barrels of junk for material. Cursing seemed to help.

Then the afternoon came on hotter than ever. Hell couldn't be any hotter than that stuffy little back room under a tin roof in late June in Virginia. I'd been sweating all day, but I hadn't been noticing it much. Now, as I leaned over one of the layout sheets spread on the stone, drops of water rained upon it, one after another, literally soaking the paper. I pushed the wet hair off my forehead with a filthy hand. "God damn!"

In midafternoon I was fighting for time, watching the shadows lengthen to one side of the building apprehensively. There were still three ads to set, and it seemed impossible to make greater speed. It

seemed, rather, as though I were slowing up. I began to wish I'd eaten lunch. I felt a little sick, all gone at the stomach, but I couldn't stop now.

I walked into the front room and sat on the desk, resting for a moment. Grover and Virgie were hard at it, setting, setting, setting, in grim silence. Virgie's hair was damp, too, clinging to her forehead. She had picked a rose and stuck it in a glass of water on the desk, but it had wilted already. Everything outside looked wilted and ugly, the trees gray, the fields dull brown. God, if only it would rain!

I looked around for a drink, and Grover showed me a grimy Mason jar he had carried from the house. There was no running water in the shop. I tilted the jar. The water was tepid.

Grover still wore his old black hat and his coat. He didn't seem to be feeling the heat. His dry, brown old skin looked as though it had been sweated out many summers ago. "How are you coming?" I said, and he grunted.

I went over to the galleys where he and Virgie were putting the type, one stickful at a time. What they had set already seemed pitifully little, and I said so.

The old printer flared up. "We're no machines, you know! Three galleys a day is as much as any printer's supposed to set. I used to be able to set four when I was younger, and I can still set maybe three and a half if my strength holds out. Virgie's just beginnin', but she can set a galley and a half."

"All right," I said, "I didn't mean to criticize."

I went back to my ads. If I worked steadily, I found I didn't have time to worry. Only it was becoming harder to make any progress. The fonts of type were running low. Every minute or so I had to stop and hunt through the mess of unsorted type on the stone for a capital "O" or a small "e" or some other letter. Finally I couldn't find another "e" in a certain font. I used a synonym for the word in the copy. I hoped the advertisers wouldn't notice the minor changes in their copy. Then I thought, "Damn 'em anyhow, they're getting enough for their money!"

A train whistle split the heavy afternoon, but I didn't stop to watch the cars go pounding past. Grover shuffled in and stood looking over my shoulder. "That's six o'clock," he said. "Virgie and I are goin' to supper."

Damn! I looked at him. His face was haggard.

He was, I knew, a sick old man, despite his stubborn spirit. I wanted to beg him to come back and work a few hours after dinner, but I hadn't the heart.

"I'll see you after supper," he said, although I had said nothing, and he followed his daughter across the field before I could thank him.

At the Boltons' I washed my hands and sloshed cold water on my face, but didn't attempt to make myself presentable. When I started to apologize to Mrs Bolton, she looked surprised. "Why, we never bother to dress up," she assured me. "The girls and Mr Bolton have to go back to the store after supper." Eating without tasting the food, I was glad Mr Bolton and the girls talked so little. It would have been hard to be civil to anyone that day.

Walking back to the shop, I noticed the town was coming to life as the heat relaxed its grip a trifle. People sat in rocking chairs on front porches and stared as I passed. Voices floated softly across the quiet of evening. Some young people were playing croquet as twilight lingered on the lawn. They burst into laughter, and I wondered if they were laughing at me. . . . Ah, to hell with them!

Grover and Virgie had returned already. "Well, Mr Grover, do you think we'll go to press tonight?" I said, trying to sound cheerful.

The printer shook his head. "I don't know. You got all them heads to set before you can make up the forms, you know."

"If you and Virgie can finish the straight matter, I think I can handle the rest," I told him.

He looked at me quizzically. "You're not like them boys around here. Most of 'em never did a day's work in their lives. I mind one of 'em I had in here to help me. He wanted me to pay him just for lettin' me look at him sittin' around."

I said, "Mr Grover, I'm not a boy." But I appreciated his little tribute; he praised so seldom.

And now, as the day ended and dusk crept softly around the walls of the shop, I enjoyed the work again. Now that the ads were out of the way, setting the headlines and making up the pages was exciting. It was exciting to see the paper at last beginning to take shape right under my hands.

But by the time the nine-o'clock train from the South roared past the shop, I was having to drive myself once more. My back ached. My brain had gone numb, so that I had to say to my hands, "Now

do this, now do that." I had become conscious of every little motion that ordinarily would be done without thinking. Handling the type that Virgie and Grover had set so laboriously was like carrying an armful of loose eggs—it was so easy to pi a line of the tiny individual letters. If I dropped a single handful it would mean an hour of Grover's time wasted.

Finally I had four of the eight pages made up. I went into the other room to see if Grover and Virgie had set the last of the copy. Virgie was sucking on her fingers. I made her show them to me. The forefinger and middle finger of one hand were raw at the tips from rubbing against the type so many hours. She showed them to me only grudgingly and smiled, a little deprecating smile.

"You had better go home," I said. "You've done too much already."

"Oh no, I'd rather stay and help you finish." She was actually pleading with her large, acceptive eyes.

I said, "I'm an inconsiderate boss or I'd have made you go home hours ago."

Grover looked up from the wooden box on which he sat in front of another case of type.

"He's right, Virgie. You better go home now. I can finish up alone."

"Yes, Poppa." She halted in the doorway. "I'll come down early in the morning and mail out the papers, if you get them run off." She smiled at me—confidently, I thought—and as she disappeared into the night, I called after her, "Don't worry, we're going to press tonight, all right, and—thanks!"

Virgie, so Grover had told me, had two children. Her husband was dead. Probably she felt she owed it to her father to help him support her children. Nevertheless, there was no reason why she should work for me until her fingers were raw. . . .

When she had gone, the silence shut down over the shop like a stifling hand. Outside there were the faint noises of the field, the sparrows, the katydids. But inside there were only the old printer and I, tongueless with our thoughts. What was he thinking, I wondered, crouching on his box, his old hat shadowing his lean face as the yellow light fell upon it? A brown toad hopped across the threshold and blinked in the light. I moved toward the door, and it hopped away. In a house across the field a tinny

gramophone was playing, "Oh, give me something to remember you by-y-y."

I said, "You ought to come here and see the moon, Mr Grover. It's just coming up, real yellow and big as a bushel."

But the old printer didn't answer. I turned and saw his face had gone pale and that it was set in harsh lines as he labored over his stick. I hurried back to my own work, unable to feel any real joy in the moon.

Two more hours dragged by, and the old man had finished his part of the job. He came into the back room, swaying on his feet a little, his voice toneless. "I'd stay," he said, "but I wouldn't be any use to you. I'm not so young any more, I guess."

"The deuce you say," I told him. "You've only worked fourteen hours today!" But he shuffled away, mumbling and shaking his head.

Then the night wore on endlessly. Sometime later I looked up, startled, to find Kay Bolton, the oldest of the girls, offering some sandwiches and coffee which Mrs Bolton had sent. She skipped away before I could talk to her, and again I was alone with the shadow of the silent press that awaited my touch to wake it.

Finally I got the last of the forms made up. I started lifting them off the stone and sliding them into the bed of the press. They weighed about sixty pounds, and there were four of them. I had to slide them from the stone, to my bent knee, to the floor, and then drag them to the press. When I got the last of them safely stowed away, my arms and knees were quivering. I went out to the car and found a half-empty quart of gin in one of the pockets. The raw stuff burned, but it stopped the quivering.

I found a rusty Stillson wrench and started bolting the locks on the press. The nuts were almost round, and the wrench slipped at every turn. Finally the last bolt was as tight as I could make it. I threw the wrench on the floor and stumbled to the wall switch. For a moment the great old monster merely trembled. Then it heaved mightily. The wooden arm which caught the papers as they came off the cylinder lifted up in a half-arc and slapped the first copy down on the receiving board.

I must have gone a little mad when that first paper came to rest. I shut off the power and grabbed it. It was smeary, and there were plenty of typographical errors—but it was all there! For

some reason, I looked around the deserted shop then and started to laugh. I held the paper at arm's length and punched my fist clean through it. I kept yelling, "Well, I'll be damned! I'll be God damned!"

After that, I felt better. I started the press again and kept shoving the blank newsprint into it, one sheet about every five seconds. I had to stop the motor a score of times and untangle papers that had gotten wound around the ink rollers. But by dawn the run was off.

Oddly, I had stopped feeling tired now. I felt perfectly light, with all the exhilaration of a first drunk.

When the press had coasted to a final halt, I went to the back door and gulped in the fresh morning air. It must have been about five o'clock. All over the field the ground mist lay—like a white, knee-deep lake.

The world didn't know it, but something had happened while it slept, I thought, and then I laughed again.

CHAPTER FOUR

LINK would arrive from New York that night. A week ago, my third in Carterville, I had written him. I had tried not to describe the situation in glowing terms, for I knew him of old—so quickly disappointed if a thing didn't appear on the surface to be what he'd expected.

I remembered our high-school days. We used to spend hours sitting in his attic debating politics. Link's family was conservative, mine liberal. I did most of the talking, advancing a new utopian theory each time, always hoping to strike one which he couldn't pick to pieces. He used to madden me by saying, "But everybody would have to be honest to make that work. You've got to take human nature into account." My only comeback then was, "Why don't you advance an idea if you think that one's no good? Are you satisfied with things as they are?"

As a matter of fact, he *was* satisfied at that time.

Those were the boom days. His father was a bond salesman, mine a newspaper man. Although our families were in virtually the same circumstances, his people considered mine slightly common. In the restricted Long Island suburb where we both lived, it was generally felt that the Andrews' were just passing through. We didn't belong to the country club, and we affronted the neighborhood with an old battered Dodge which had been twice across the continent. Furthermore, we rented! We weren't considered taxpayers. That, in the Coolidge-Hoover era, very nearly placed one beyond the pale.

Link never worried about the future when we were in high school. He was sure he was going to be rich—someday, somehow. I worried all the time, being unable to imagine myself as anything but an office boy. Oh, I could imagine myself in some high place, but I couldn't think of any practical way of getting there, and I wasn't able to take it for granted that I would. For that reason, I left college at the end of the second year. I *had* to find out at once whether there was a niche for me in the world. If there hadn't been—well, I had all kinds of wild ideas.

Link had flunked out in his freshman year. But that was four years ago. Since then he had been a day laborer, a clerk in a department store, bellhop in a hotel and, lately, a hitchhiker. All that time I had been following the line of least resistance, working on newspapers—ten or eleven of them.

Now, as I waited for him, I was thinking of a year in high school when we had decided to go into the used-car business. We had two old Fords which we were going to fix up and sell at a profit and buy better cars and sell them at a profit, and so on. It had sounded simple. But somehow we never got around to working on the cars. Always one of us had a girl he had to drive somewhere. Usually the car would break down in some remote spot and the driver would say, importantly, "Just wait till I call up my business partner. He'll be right out with another car." One day when I wanted to paint the cars, Link decided the used-car business was impractical and we had better give it up.

I wondered if Link had changed any in the year or so since I had seen him. At least, he should be less of a conservative now, having nothing to lose. . . . It was odd, I thought, that he and I should have remained such friends through the years, being so

different in our outlook. I had written him, as I told myself, because I knew I had no sense about money, and he, being so conservative, surely would be better able to handle the paper's finances. The real reason I had sent for him, I knew, was that I had to have someone to talk to.

I got his letter out of the desk and started to read it again:

Your letter was at home when I got back from Chicago. I hitchhiked all the way. Not like the old days, eh? Home isn't what it used to be. I mean, I don't seem to feel at home here any more. So I'll be more than glad to join you in your great adventure. Not that I wouldn't be glad anyhow, you damned bomb thrower. . . . Look for me the day after you get this.

He would be hitchhiking. People hadn't been buying many bonds in the last few years, and his father still was casting about for something else to sell. Link never asked help in that quarter.

While I waited, I tried to write next week's column, but I couldn't make much headway. I kept thinking of the times that Link and I already had

come to call "the good old days," as though they were gone forever. The night was a little cool, almost with a foretaste of fall in the air. Old man Grover puttered about, methodically breaking up last week's paper and throwing in the type. Not only on publication day, but every day, the old printer and I worked after supper until nine or ten o'clock. Sometimes we talked, more often not. But it was a companionable silence. Once I told him that he didn't need to work at night, as far as I was concerned. "Well, it's just like this," he said, "if I ain't doin' nothin' I got time to think about my rheumatism. Somehow it don't seem to hurt me so much when I'm workin'."

Now I watched him take the old broom and begin to sweep the floor, as he always did before going home. "Mr Grover," I said, "I wish you'd do me a small favor before you go." It seemed a childish thing that I was going to ask, and I hesitated, wondering if it wouldn't be better to put the matter off a few days. Finally I told him I wanted him to set Link's name in type the size of mine and insert it in the paper's masthead with the title "Business Manager."

"It's L-i-n-c-o-l-n A-t-k-i-n-s," I said, spelling

it out. He leaned on the broom, regarding me quiz-zically. That morning, when I had told him Link was coming, he had started to mumble and shake his head. "Course, you know your business and all like that, but it just 'pears to me like three people's about all this paper's goin' to support." When he had continued to grumble, I had lost patience and told him that was my worry, not his, and, anyway, Link wouldn't want any pay other than his keep. It was our first quarrel.

"Well, are you going to set it or not?" I said as he poked in a corner with the broom, not replying at once.

"D' you have to have it tonight?"

"Yes, I want it ready when he comes."

The old man picked up his type stick. "Well, you know what you're doin' . . ."

When he had gone I studied the line he had set, reading the type upside down and touching it with my fingers. I couldn't help feeling a little glow of pride, for it seemed to me that I had a better gift for Link than money could buy.

Toward midnight I was standing in the door, watching the headlight of a train advancing on the tracks, when I heard Link whistle, one short note

and two long ones, an old fraternity whistle we had used in high school. I tried to whistle in reply but found I'd forgotten how. "Hey, fellow!" I shouted, and in a moment he came into the circle of light beyond the doorway.

And then, without even saying hello, he blurted out, "My God, Jimson, where's the town?"

"You're standing right in Times Square now," I told him, laughing, and he laughed, too. But I knew at once that, after all, he hadn't changed.

Still I was glad to see him. He was about a head taller than I, too tall for his weight, so that my mother used to say he reminded her of a giraffe. He didn't mind being called that, though. He carried himself with a good-tempered, boyishly unaggressive air.

Seeing him now in an old sweat shirt and holding a little zipper bag—probably all of his worldly goods—I was struck with the thought of the long trip he had made that day, when he knew in advance there wasn't much at the end of the road for him.

"Well, come in, come in!" I shouted and began shaking hands and punching him in the ribs to

cover the slight embarrassment which we both felt. I led him into the back room and made him look at the date on the press and showed him the rest of the worn-out machinery. He examined everything gravely, though he knew nothing about the mechanics of a print shop. Then he started to chuckle. "My God, Jimson, how you love to collect junk. Remember the old Fords? What are you going to do, paint this stuff and trade it for the New York *Times*?"

I made myself laugh with him, "Yeah, something like that. . . . But wait, you haven't seen anything yet." Then I showed him his name in the masthead. He couldn't read type, so I read it to him, "Jimson Andrews, Editor; Lincoln Atkins, Business Manager." Finally he saw that I was waiting for him to say something. "Does that mean I have to pay the bills?" he said, joking.

"Yes," I said, "something like that."

I got out a Mason jar of corn whisky which I had bought when I got his letter. "I have to keep this hidden," I told him. "My printer's a reformed drunkard. The old reprobate told me the other day he wouldn't work for any man that drank."

"Well, he won't be working long for you, then," Link said, making a wry face at the raw liquor.

After we had had several drinks, laughing and talking about New York and our high-school days, he suddenly became serious. I knew what he was going to say: "But, Jimson, if you were out of a job and came down here, I could understand it. But why did you quit a good job? My God, you don't think there's any future in this dump, do you?"

I thought a moment, trying to frame some reasonable answer. But I couldn't give my reason in so many words. It seemed to have more to do with feeling than with common sense. Finally I said, "I'll admit there's very little future here. But I've already grown to love every piece of type in this old shop. When I sit here alone at night, the walls seem to warm up around me and become part of me. It's my kingdom, I guess."

"You always were kind of screwy." Link took another drink, watching me over the rim of the jar.

"Let's not talk about it," I said. "Maybe you'll feel different after you've been here awhile."

Suddenly I was depressed. I was almost seeing my

little world as he saw it. We went across the field to the Boltons', and I showed him the room I had arranged with Mrs Bolton for him to have. I said, "Good night. I certainly am glad you got here." But as I went on to my own room, I wondered why on earth I had sent for him.

CHAPTER FIVE

LINK went to Culpeper, thirteen miles away, to sell ads, and I called on Abe Stein.

Mrs Bolton had told me about the Jew who ran the town's only so-called department store. He had come there about two years ago, a youngish man who held a law degree, with a plump, amicable wife, several years his senior. It was his wife's money, it was said around town, that had bought the business. The town liked Mrs Stein, but Abe had offended it from the start. It appeared he had a reputation for always disagreeing, particularly about "policies" in Carterville. It was said he even had gone so far as to advocate that the merchants close their stores at five o'clock, instead of ten or later. Most of the farmers couldn't come to town until after supper, but he didn't seem to have much sympathy with them. On this occasion he was reported to have declared, "The farmer should serve the town, not the town the farmer. That's

the logical order for the brute animal." Now the town had ceased asking the Jew to act on civic committees and such. And the farmers went to Culpeper for their heavy shirts and socks and winter underwear.

I found Abe Stein in midmorning, sitting in the rear of the narrow, windowless store, reading a book. He was dark and wiry, and seeing him on the street before, I had been reminded of a Washington Square Communist.

"Good morning, Mr Stein," I cried, with an attempt at the professional salesman's heartiness. "Do you think this heat's ever going to let up?"

"Yes?" He laid his book aside without rising and regarded me with a half-contemptuous smile. I decided to abandon the roundabout approach. It would merely amuse him.

"I want to sell you an ad," I said. "You can practically name your own price this first time, until we see what results it will bring."

"I wouldn't take an ad in your paper at any price."

"Why?"

He picked up the book and fluttered its pages, seeking his place. "Take your editorials defending

the NRA. Who is going to read them? These people aren't interested in anything like that. All they want to read about is Aunt Susie's illness and who is visiting the Smith family this week."

This was a sore point with me. "I print all the social items I can get," I snapped. "We had four columns of them in last week's paper. The editorials are an added attraction—no, they're more than that. They're the chief reason for running a paper. But I think you're making a mistake in underestimating the intelligence of these country people."

"Do you really think so, young man? Do you? When you have been here as long as I have, perhaps you will change your ideas."

His sarcasm, his smugness as he sat turning the pages and ignoring me, were hard to bear. "If that's what you think, it's no wonder they don't come into your store," I said.

He stood up suddenly and walked to a counter, where his hands moved nervously in a pile of silk stockings. His voice flared almost hysterically: "D' you think I care a hang if they don't come in? Why, I don't care a hang if the *good* people you think so much of never come near me!"

He paused a moment. I was too surprised to say anything. Then he turned from the counter and faced me. His face looked all tightened up. "I know *you*. You think you can come down here and pat them on the back and make them like you. But you can't, you and your schoolboy radicalism!"

"Mr Stein," I said, "you're a damn fool!" I started toward the door, trembling a little and wishing I had been able to think of something more insulting to say. The storekeeper was so quiet that I wondered if he was about to leap on my back. I hoped he would.

"Wait a minute." The man's voice was almost a sob. He was leaning against the counter, gripping the edge of it with both hands. "I suppose I only said that because I tried to do the same thing and couldn't put it over," he said, without looking at me.

I began to apologize for my own outburst, but he interrupted. "D' you know, nobody talks to me any more? All they do is go honeying around my wife, telling her they're sorry for her. Sorry for *her*, imagine! Why, I've studied more and thought more than anybody that ever lived in this town."

Then all the bitterness and disappointment in

him seemed to break over and beat down his reserve, so that he was babbling in a low monotone, "I couldn't afford to take an ad. That's the truth. I had plenty of money when I came to this town. But not any more, not any more. . . . If you take my advice, you'll get out of this awful place while you've still got a shirt to your back. It will break your heart, I'm telling you. You'll find out."

When he stopped speaking, the stifling heat and the silence of the town came down so heavily that I thought of the two of us as being held under water until our lungs were nearly bursting. I wanted to say something to help the man, but I couldn't think of anything. I knew it was too late to tell him why he was failing.

Back at the shop I sat for a long time looking out the window, though I wasn't seeing the field. I was trying to get hold of an idea. Little sounds—the click of type against the stick in old man Grover's hands, some children's voices over in the schoolyard—came to me from a long way off. After a while I found an old sheet of newsprint and started laying out an ad. As the idea took hold, I began to

laugh. Grover looked up, and I showed him what I had done:

WILL THIS AD BRING ANY RESULTS ? ? ?

ABE STEIN IS SELLING

SUMMER DRESSES

AT LOW COST

HE NEEDS YOUR TRADE RIGHT NOW!

"We'll set this up to cover half a page," I said.

Grover looked noncommittal. "How much you gettin' for it?"

"Nothing."

The old printer shook his head, but I had expected that. I went into the back room and started picking out some heavy type. Sometime later I heard the Ford outside, and after the motor was shut off, I could hear the water chuckling in the radiator, still boiling. Link came in and, without speaking, watched what I was doing.

"Well?" I said finally.

"Sorry," he said. "I went to every store in Culpeper and didn't even get a nibble. Lord, Jimson, I don't know how you manage to sell ads. Why, most of the men wouldn't even talk to me."

I started to say something, but I thought of the trouble that I, too, had had that first day. Link, though he had been here only a few days, already looked worn. And he *had* been trying.

"You'll have better luck next week," I told him. "These merchants won't trust us till they've seen us around awhile."

The noon local was clanging its bell as it pulled into Carterville, and Link and I went home for lunch.

At dinner Mr Bolton, bending over his plate, asked me, "What do you think about this here AAA and all that stuff?"

"Why, I'm all for it," I told him. "Of course, it's not working out perfectly, but then what system ever did without years of experimenting and changing the original setup? People who criticize the New Deal forget that it took a good many years to develop the Republican conception, and that even then there were plenty of flaws. I think government regulation, now that we've built up such a complex financial system, is indispensable to some extent. Only the trouble with the NRA, of course, is that it's not being enforced."

Mr Bolton nodded. I saw that Mrs Bolton was interested and that even the girls were listening. Who said these people were dumb?

"One of the reasons I came down here," I went on, "is that I have a notion the country has been concentrating too much on its cities, and that what goes on there and what city people are thinking isn't going to be the most important factor in the final result. But perhaps I'm wrong. It was the cities that decided the fate of the Roman Empire."

As I spoke, I wondered if what I was saying meant anything. When one deals in words, as I had on newspapers, there comes a point when any idea sounds hollow after it has been phrased. In New York, everyone I had known was forever talking and talking, until many of us were desperate for some more real expression—some expression in action. Then there was only a bottle of gin.

Now the Boltons, listening to me out of the comparative silence they had always known, seemed to make my own words take on body. I began to feel some exuberance.

"The farmers down here are pretty well satisfied right now," said Mr Bolton. "They're getting ninety cents a bushel for wheat this month, and

that's a big thing to them. Some of 'em can't understand why they shouldn't plant all the wheat they can. Mr Alden—he's the county agent—goes around and tries to explain it."

"There you have it," Link put in, "they'll never be satisfied with what they're given. They'll always want more. That's only human nature. That's what I've always told you, Jimson."

"What I can't understand," I said, ignoring him, "is why the Piedmont is so bone poor, despite everything. Nobody in this section seems to be buying clothes and automobiles, the things that will enable the merchants to live. Every merchant I've talked to complains about the bills he can't collect."

"I'm carrying a lot of folks on my books," Mr Bolton said. "Some of them are beginning to pay up now."

"Yes, but where *is* the money?"

"Well, I guess a lot of folks around here are trying to catch up on their debts. They're a pretty honest lot. They want to get paid up before they buy new things. Times are better this year, but it won't begin to show for a while yet."

As we talked, the girls moved about quietly, re-

moving the plates, and I could hear them beginning to wash dishes in the kitchen. The girls, I thought, were sad, as though each carried some secret hope that never would be fulfilled. What did the future hold for them? They were not unattractive, though rather wispy and pallid. They seemed different from the girls I had always known, in that they *bore* their lot. City girls, by comparison, seemed hysterical.

Yet these girls didn't lack imagination. Kay had showed me some things she had tried to write, little descriptions of people she knew, and so on, though she assured me that she knew she couldn't "write." And one evening before Link arrived I had come upon Peggy, the middle sister, standing in the yard and looking up at the moon through the branches of a tree. I had said, "It's grand, isn't it?" and she had replied, "Yes, isn't it?"

Tonight Peggy, who was seventeen and blonde, had worn a new dress at dinner, a belted Russian smock and white skirt. Peggy, I knew, spent hours studying *Vogue* and other fashion magazines. She had made the dress herself.

Kay, who was nineteen, wore her brown hair drawn away from her forehead in a harsh line. She

had taken a course in bookkeeping, and now she assumed the chief responsibility at the store. Yet she was not of the schoolteacher type. She had a high forehead and long line of cheek which gave her face a lean keenness at moments when she didn't know anyone was watching her.

The three girls sat opposite Link and me at the long table, and throughout the meal they kept their eyes on their plates. Link had been flustering Peggy at dinner: "You're all dressed up tonight, aren't you? Expecting a best beau, I guess." Peggy hadn't answered, and there had been an awkward silence for a moment.

Finally Mr Bolton scraped back his chair loudly and reached to the center of the table for a toothpick. "Excuse me, got to get back to the store now."

Link and I went into the barnlike living room. There was no rug on the shellacked floor. The ancient overstuffed sofa gaped at the seams. Link put a record on the gramophone, "Who stole my heart away, who-o-o-o-o . . ." The needle caught, repeating the note until I shut off the machine.

"I guess there's nothing to do but go back to the shop and work some more," I said.

"What a dump!" Link was disgusted already.

Then Peggy and Kay came in. When they saw us, they started to retreat, but Link said, "Hey, come on in, we're not going to bite you. What do you do around here to amuse yourself?"

Kay laughed. "Nothing. That's just it." She leaned on the mantel. "Give me a puff of your cigarette. Mother doesn't like it, but——"

"I feel like a city slicker corrupting a poor little country girl," I said, trying to laugh. Link already was sitting on the sofa with Peggy, talking in low tones. For some reason I was embarrassed. I leaned on the opposite side of the mantel and started one of my orations, as Link called them: "You know, you girls aren't so bad off at that. You don't have to go to an office and file papers or pound a typewriter eight hours a day, as you might be doing in the city. And you've got plenty of room to get out and walk, and you can do a lot of reading." I knew I was being trite, but I wanted to cast a conversational damper over Link's endeavors. "You ought to develop some kind of hobby," I said, speaking louder. "You could study drawing, or collect stamps——"

"Aw, tie the bull outside, will you, Jimson?"

Link had his arm across the back of the couch, and Peggy was giggling.

"We've got to get back to the store," Kay said quickly. "Come on, Peggy, come on now."

When they had gone, I tried to explain the situation to Link. "I don't care what you do," I told him, "but we've got to live in this house for some time, you know. And, furthermore, this is a very small town."

He was half angry. "Baloney. Now that you're the respectable editor, you think you've got to be a Christer, too."

We went back to the shop in silence.

CHAPTER SIX

IN THE main street in the late afternoon a little group of the town boys had gathered, watching Harry Mason, the stout, sloppy, good-natured cop. Harry was bending over the gutter in front of the bank. He was snapping his fingers and cooing, "Come, baby, come on up, up." Then he stood up, laughing and holding out his arm with a six-foot boa constrictor wrapped around it.

The boys gave back a little, and Harry laughed some more. "Oh, Baby wouldn't hurt anybody, would she? Nice baby." He caressed the snake with his free hand. "You never saw my little beauty, did you?" he said to me. Its tongue flickered very fast and red, near enough so that I could see the inside of its open mouth.

"That's some pet, Harry, but if it's all the same to you, I'd rather not touch it," I said. I didn't want to seem afraid before the others, but it was hard not to step back, as they had.

"All right, only she wouldn't hurt you unless you made her mad. She bit me once, but it didn't hurt much." The policeman gently folded the snake into a box he kept in the rear of his Ford. Several years ago he had gone to Texas and returned with the baby boa. It would be a good mascot for the Carterville baseball team, he had decided.

"Suppose you give me some news," I said. "What's the police department been doing lately?"

The youths had moved away, and we were standing by the car alone. "It's the same old story," Harry said. "Nothing ever happens in this town." But he was shifting his feet, and I guessed that something had happened and he wasn't sure whether he ought to tell me. "By the way," I said, "I want to get the line-up for next week's game. Let's go up to the shop for a minute."

Fortunately, Virgie and Grover had gone home already when we got there. I wrote down the line-up of the ball team, asking Harry to spell each name, though I knew them all. It was an old reporter's dodge, trading favors with the police. Finally I picked up a handout, pretending to read it, and waited for him to talk of his own accord.

He sat on the edge of the desk, his khaki shirt open at the neck, his officer's cap pushed back on his bushy head. "I don't know if I ought to tell you this," he began. "I don't think it's anything you could put in the paper."

"Don't worry," I said. "You know I wouldn't do anything that might get you in trouble."

"Oh, it's not that. Only I just don't think there's anything to it. You see, there's this old guy, Professor Carney, and his daughter that live in a big barn of a place down by the creek. They don't mix with the town at all, and so naturally there's been a lot of talk about 'em. This girl—I think her name's Doris or Dora or something—anyway, she's a right smart-looking gal, and some of these gossipy old women that ain't got anything better to do but talk, like to say she's a bad woman. But I know there ain't a word of truth in it. This girl's as proud as anything. She only comes to town about twice a week to get some things at Bolton's store, and then she skips right back home, without looking at anybody. Why, one day I tipped my cap to her and she never even said, 'How d' you do.'"

"There's no use paying attention to a lot of gossip," I said, urging him on. Outside, the field

shimmered in the slanting rays of the sunset. It was one of those days when time and living things seem to move together almost mechanically, like a motorized reaper slowly scything down the stalks. In time the reaper would come to the end of the row, I thought.

"But that ain't all there is to it," Harry was saying. "This ain't just gossip. The other day, yesterday, I was driving along the old dirt road, and when I come to the Carneys' place I saw this girl leaning on the gate. She looked like she wanted to speak to me but couldn't make up her mind. She sort of half waved and then looked away. I stopped the car and asked her was anything the matter. She didn't answer right away, and I got out of the car and went over to the gate. When I got up close I could see she was mad about something. She was breathing fast, and she looked as pale as water. She had a letter in her hand. 'You're the policeman, aren't you?' she says to me. 'I want you to find out who sent this!' You'd have thought she was a top sergeant the way she snapped at me."

Harry slid off the desk and started fumbling in his pockets. "By God, I hope I can find that thing now. She'll be hoppin' mad if I've gone and lost it."

"Well, what did it say?" I said.

"Oh, it was just a couple of lines, saying she better get out of town if she knows what's good for her. I told her there wasn't nothin' to it. I figured one of these old women around town sent it just for spite. So then she says, 'You're quite right, officer. Give me back the letter, please.' I told her I'd keep it a couple of days and do some investigating, but she says, 'No, I'd rather let the matter drop.' She made me promise to bring her back the letter."

"Did you tell anybody else about it?" I asked him.

"No. Say, you're not going to put anything in the paper, are you?"

"I don't know," I said. "What are you going to do about it?" He was standing against one of the cases of type. His face, usually so open and childishly free of care, now was extremely homely. I recalled old man Grover's comment, "Ho, Harry Mason, he's a good fellow. But he ain't no policeman. He never arrested a body yet, except maybe a couple of drunks."

"It's like I told you," Harry said. "I don't think there's anything to it. And I'll be darned if I see any sense in going around from door to door, ask-

ing folks if they sent the letter. Why, I'd have the whole town laughing at me."

"Yes," I said, "I guess you're right."

Meanwhile, he played with his boa constrictor.

There was no moon, but the starlight lay over the land with a shadowless texture that made a scream imminent. When I swung the car toward the gate and turned off the motor, the headlights made the grass bright. They picked out the house in the moment before I switched them off—a bleak two-story structure with a cupola, gray paint peeling off the thin pillars which supported the porch roof. A chipped, verdigrised iron statue of a deer stood out of the tall weeds which claimed the yard.

"Nice place," Link said, *sotto voce*.

I pushed at the gate. "Yeah, we'll be lucky if we don't get shot."

As we stumbled across the yard a door opened, letting a shaft of light onto the porch. "Who's that?" It was a girl's voice, husky, almost a whisper.

"It's the editor of the paper," I called.

When we reached the porch steps, she shut the door behind her and said, "What do you want?"

She wore a brown skirt and sweater. She was tall, and her limbs and breasts had a reckless sweep about them, I thought. Her face in the shadows seemed so pale and languorous that it gave the impression of being covered with a veil. She must have been nineteen or twenty, but she seemed more of a woman than a girl. She stood with one hand on the knob of the door, guarding it.

"We want to talk to you," I said.

"Well, you can't come in. I'm sorry, but my father is sick." She spoke in low tones, as though afraid someone within the house would hear her. She didn't seem afraid of us.

"Look here," I said, keeping my own voice down, "I understand you're being threatened. Harry Mason told me about the letter."

She left the door and moved to the edge of the porch. I couldn't tell whether she was looking at me or not, but I felt that she was. "Well, I don't know . . . I don't even know who you are." There was something about her stance—it was so taut and erect, her voice so vibrant and yet repressed—that I got the impression she might crack, crumple up any minute. I mounted the two steps and stood beside her, feeling that she needed sup-

port. I was about a head taller than she, I noticed, though I had thought she was taller at first glance. "We want to help you," I said. "If you won't let us come in, can't you walk out to the car with us?"

She had her head turned up and half away, an odd gesture, as though she were gazing yearningly toward the stars, not really conscious of our presence. Now she nodded slightly. As we made our way across the yard, I put two fingers under her elbow to steady her, but she pulled away—with that same odd, independent gesture.

At the gate she halted. "Who's your friend?"

"He's helping with the paper."

"Tell him to go sit in the car." She spoke as though she were used to being obeyed, her voice, now that we were away from the house, brisk and almost snappish.

When Link had gotten beyond earshot she turned to me with the same commanding tone. "You can't put anything about me in your paper, do you understand?"

"I wasn't going to," I said. Then, because she had challenged me, "But I would if I wanted to."

She tossed her head impatiently. "Don't be silly. I don't care about myself. But my father's not well. A thing like this would be a shock to him."

There was something about the way she spoke of her father that made me think of a mother protecting her young. Her tone was almost savage. "All right, you have my promise," I told her, and I felt a little ashamed for having tried to impress her with my own importance.

Then she turned toward me, smiling with a small, crinkly grimace. Her teeth glinted faintly. "I appreciate your wanting to help. Only . . . only I don't think I need any help. I'm sorry now that I told the policeman about that note."

"You're very brave," I said.

"Oh, that . . ." Her head was turned half away again. She had, I noticed, small, regular features, except that her nose was tilted upward with the same line of her gesture. The whole semblance of her face and carriage was up, up, and I was interested.

"You speak very well, not like these country-folk," I said, irrelevantly.

"Yes? I took my degree at the University. My father used to teach there. Is there anything else you'd like to know?"

"No. I mean, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry into your life." I fumbled, she had read my thoughts so rapidly. "I've only been here a few

weeks, and I hadn't heard anything about you until the other day."

"And what did you hear? I think I can guess. Is that why you've come?" She laughed briefly.

"No," I said, "please don't misunderstand. It would have been too much trouble to come if I had thought that."

"Too much trouble, eh? But if it weren't for that——" She laughed again, one sharp, disdainful note.

There was a silence then. The chirruping of the crickets, the rippling of the brook behind the house, and all the muted sounds of the little night things swarmed up around us. Finally I said, "I think you know you're being unfair. Wouldn't you like to come and see my shop sometime? I'd like to show it to you."

"No, I can't leave Father." Then she added, as though she were conferring a favor, "But you may send me your paper. I'd like to see what you're doing with it. It's been so terrible in the past."

"Maybe I could bring you a copy," I suggested, but she said at once, "No, no, you can't come here."

"But I'd like to meet your father," I persisted.

"I'd like to talk with him. Lord knows, there are few enough educated people in this town."

"No, you can't."

"But I don't think it would do him any harm," I argued. "It might even help him to have company once in a while."

She didn't reply. I was surprised at myself for insisting. Perhaps it was that she said "no" so constantly, that her whole attitude was to withdraw, which made me want to know more about her. Suddenly she said, "You may be right. Perhaps Father does need someone besides me to talk to."

She turned back toward the house then, as though, having conceded a point, she wanted to escape. "But wait," I said. "You haven't told me anything about this threatening letter. Don't you have any idea who might have sent it?"

"I don't want to talk about that," she said quickly. "I don't think it will happen again."

She was running across the yard, and I started to follow her. "No," she cried, "you must go on now. I can't talk to you any more tonight."

When I got in the car Link said, "Well, you took long enough. What did you find out?"

"Nothing," I said, starting the motor.

"You certainly talked long enough. I think that girl must be crazy, don't you?"

"No," I said, and somehow, as we drove on back to town, I didn't want to discuss her with him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LINK was writing a business letter. He had squeezed the typewriter onto one corner of the desk—Virgie had propped a case of type on the main part of it. Virgie had the only chair in the shop. Link stood up and leaned over the machine as he tapped awkwardly. Old man Grover sat on his soapbox before a rack of type.

Link came into the back room where I was working on an ad. "Here, sign this please, Mr Editor."

"You sign it, you're the business manager," I said. I couldn't understand why Link wouldn't take responsibilities. He was my age. He would have to get into the habit of doing things on his own if he was to be of any help in running the paper, I thought.

"Well, read it, anyway," he pleaded.

I glanced at the sheet he had laid on the stone: "Dear Sirs: Please send us a ream of paper . . ."

I was impatient that he had interrupted my work

for a trifle—every minute counted. Suddenly I started to laugh. He looked hurt. I laughed louder, pounding the stone. "Link, you've got that all wrong. What it ought to say is, 'Dear Sirs: Please don't *ream* us but send us a ream of paper!' Right?"

Then Link started to laugh, too. We both punched each other and hooted so loudly that old man Grover came poking his head before him. "See here, Mr Grover," I cried, "see Link's idea of a business letter!" He started to peer at the paper, but I grabbed it before he could read the wording. "Why, this paper company has been overcharging us, so Link has written to them not to *ream* us but to send us a ream of paper."

The old printer looked blank as Link and I laughed some more. Finally he went back to his work, shaking his head.

For those things Link and I were friends.

But sometimes he was a trial. One night we were making up forms in the back room, Virgie and Grover and I. Link was supposed to be reading galley proofs, one of the few jobs he could do.

He was very quiet in the front room. Finally I

went in to ask if he was finding many mistakes. He had a stick in his hand and was pawing at a case of type, trying to set an agate line.

"Link, for God's sake!" I said.

He looked up sheepishly. "I want to learn to set type."

"Yes, but how about those proofs? If you don't read them, I'll have to, and then we'll be slowed up another hour getting to press. Do you want to keep us here all night?"

He threw the stick on the desk, spilling some type haphazardly. "Hell, I don't see why I can't set type if I want to."

"You're only making more work for the rest of us," I blazed. "Mr Grover will have to redistribute that type you just pied."

He began to get angry, too. "All you think about is work. When I came down here I thought there 'd be some fun in it. What are you getting out of it, will you tell me?"

I sat on the desk. My back ached. It had ached steadily from bending over type ever since I came to Carterville. How long ago? Four or five weeks. I didn't even know. . . . I started to relight the pipe I'd been smoking to save on cigarettes. It

tasted sour. I'd chewed on it so long I was sick of it, and yet I had to have something in my mouth to bite when I was tired.

"Listen, fellow," I said, altering my tone, "I know it's not much fun sometimes. But there *are* times when you get a kick out of it, aren't there?" At that moment I wanted to tell him to go on back home. Certainly he was more of a nuisance than a help. But I couldn't.

Silently, he started picking up the little bits of type he had spilled. When he had them all gathered up, he said, without looking at me, "O.K., I'll be good."

"Forget it," I said.

We were friends.

Old man Grover was telling a long, rambling anecdote about Hammy Gates, a tramp printer who had worked in Carterville years ago. Grover kept on setting type as he talked: "So Hammy and I were sittin' there in church and the preacher says, 'Now I'm a-goin' to ask one of the brethren to get up and say the benediction.' So who gets up but our Mister Bixby (Hammy was workin' for him then), and when Hammy sees him walkin'

down the aisle, he nudges me and says, 'Come on, I'm gettin' out of here. I don't mind listenin' to no benediction, but I'll be damned if I'm a-goin' to listen to that old hypocrite.' "

Grover started to guffaw. "Ho, that Hammy, he wasn't afraid of no one. 'Be damned if I'll listen to that old hypocrite,' he says, 'he's just as big a sinner as I am.' "

And the old printer began to make his favorite noise, an imitation of the mayor: "Poof, poof, now b-b-brothers and s-s-sisters, w-w-we g-g-give th-th-thanks . . ."

I laughed, too.

Grover's contempt for Bixby was based on experience. Gradually, as I gained his confidence, the old printer unfolded the story.

Twelve or thirteen years ago Bixby, a fat young attorney who had just inherited wealth, decided to set up a newspaper to help his political career. At the time, Grover, a tramp printer from West Virginia, a younger, spryer Grover then, happened to be passing through.

He stopped and set up Bixby's paper for him, selected the fonts of type, found an old press that

was for sale in the next county. Then he went to work for the future mayor.

Two years later Bixby began to tire of his editorial duties—and Grover's father died, leaving him some nine hundred dollars. The printer offered to buy the paper, five hundred cash, a thousand in notes. When the third note came due, Grover couldn't meet it. Bixby took back ownership of the paper. Mr Grover, he said, could stay on as long as he wanted. He, Bixby, the paternal rich man, would always see to it that the old printer was "taken care of."

"First thing you know, along comes a new editor," Grover went on. "He gives Bixby two hundred dollars and notes. In two months he can't meet his notes and out he goes. Bixby don't wait for nobody if they ain't got the cash."

The old printer spat on a calloused forefinger. "I tell you, I seen 'em come and go here. As soon as they can't pay, out they go. Why, I'll bet Bixby's made the price of this paper three times over, sellin' it and then takin' it back."

"But why didn't someone sue him?" I protested. "Didn't they have contracts, or some form of protection?"

"Ho, they can't do nothin' with Bixby. He's got the money, and money talks. Besides, he's a smart dealer, that man is." The printer paused, pretending to be absorbed in his type. "You got a contract?"

I gulped. "Why, no, but that was my idea, not his. I didn't want to obligate myself by signing a contract."

"Well, I guess you know what you're doin'. Lord knows, I never tried to tell another man his business."

And old man Grover, who had missed the only chance he ever had to be independent, went on setting type.

One morning Mayor Bixby left his new sedan in the road and walked across the field. "W-well, h-how's it going?" He shut the sunlight out of the door, fanning himself slowly with his straw hat.

"Just fine," I said. "Won't you come in and have a look around?"

"No, th-thanks, I c-can see you've got th-things pretty well cleaned up." He drew a square paper from his pocket and unfolded it. "I h-have a little ad here th-that I w-wish you'd run in the p-p-paper."

I looked at it. It wasn't a little ad, it was a big one. It would take half a day to set it up, and this was publication day. We were behind schedule as it was.

"I told my f-friend, Mr Smith, th-that I'd get it in for him," the mayor continued. "H-he's a good f-friend of mine."

"We're always glad to get new ads," I said, "but I stopped at Mr Smith's garage the other day, and he said he couldn't afford to advertise."

"W-well now, you s-see, I told him this wouldn't c-cost him anything. I owed him a little garage b-bill, and so I s-said, 'Suppose I g-get th-that young man to put an ad in his p-paper instead.'"

The mayor waited, rocking on his feet, only a trifle embarrassed. He had one hand in his pocket, and I thought I could hear him idly jingling some coins. On that day, toward the end of the week, I had not even two quarters to jingle. I calculated rapidly. It would be two more weeks before my next payment to him fell due.

"Mr Grover," I called, "will you come here a moment?"

The printer came shuffling in from the back room, respectfully. His manner in Mayor Bixby's

presence, it seemed to me, was too respectful, almost obsequious.

"Mr Grover, we couldn't possibly set up this ad today, could we? You have too much other work on hand—isn't that right?"

He hemmed, peering gravely at the layout on my desk. "Well, I don't know. Course we might have to put off gettin' out the paper till tomorrow."

"Mr Bixby," I said, "I'm sorry, but I can't hold up the paper for a free ad. I have promised my other advertisers the paper would appear on time."

I watched the mayor's lips working, stammering to himself. Suddenly he reached in front of me and picked up the layout. He thrust it into Grover's hands, ignoring me. "Grover, y-you will s-set up th-this ad!" he said. Then he turned and lumbered across the field toward his car.

I had started to tremble violently. Virgie had stopped setting type and was watching me with her mild, acceptive look. Old man Grover again was peering at the layout, evidently not at all upset, ready to obey the mayor's order.

"Give me that," I snapped. I ran out across the field, "Mr Bixby, you——"

He halted, his fat face cold.

"You can't give my printer orders."

He waited a moment before speaking, and there in the blazing, revealing sunlight I wanted to hit his soft face more than I had ever wanted to strike any man.

"Very well," he said finally, and he took the layout which I held out to him. "If you don't c-care to ac-accommodate me, th-that's your m-misfortune." He didn't appear angry, simply cold—waiting. Then he half snorted through his nose, contemptuously, "Poof!"

I watched him slowly unlocking the door of his sedan, thinking, with an odd irrelevance, that I had never in my life locked the door of a car, a house or any piece of property. He had locked it merely to walk twenty-five yards across a field.

As I turned back to the shop, I was still trembling. Grover and Virgie were busily bent over their type, and for a moment I envied them their refuge in the taking of orders.

"Well, Mr Grover," I shouted, "I guess that's one time the old skinflint didn't get something for nothing!" I didn't want to shout, but it was like whistling in the dark.

Old man Grover pursed his lips. "Poof, poof, now Grover, you w-will s-set this here ad, poof, poof."

Virgie started to giggle, and I knew that in a moment I would be able to laugh, too. I went over and slapped the old printer on the shoulder. "Mr Grover, you've saved the day," I said.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WE HAD been invited to call upon the Logan sisters, two schoolteachers, aged twenty and twenty-two, who lived with their father, the county superintendent of schools, on a hill in back of the town. They were Carterville's "elite."

I didn't want to go. I had an ad to set that night. But Link insisted: "You ought to mix with people more. All you've seen since you came here is the inside of that print shop."

Shaving, putting on a clean shirt, finally slipping on a blue serge suit, all my other clothes having been ruined in the shop—it gave me a shock. "Lord, I feel like a country bumpkin in his first store clothes," I said.

Link had on an old pair of duck trousers which Mrs Bolton had washed and ironed for him and a sport jacket which he used to wear in high school. There were faint grease stains on the trousers, and the sleeves of the jacket left his wrists uncovered.

"We're a fine-looking pair to be going out in society. They'll probably tell us to go around to the back door," he laughed.

But when we knocked on the front door we were overwhelmed with hospitality. How did we like Carterville? They had a distant cousin in New York. Did we know her? Did we actually edit the paper ourselves, or were we just helping Mr Grover? When the conversation lagged, they suggested that we play games, anagrams, guessing games.

I felt as strange sitting in their parlor as I did about my "store clothes." What was being accomplished? I began watching the old-fashioned clock on the mantel, wondering how soon we could leave politely. Maybe I could still get in two or three hours' work.

"What's the matter? You're not ill, are you?" It was the younger sister. She didn't look like a school-teacher. The other did.

"I'm sorry if I seemed distracted," I said. "The truth is I was worrying about the paper."

"Tell me about it." She settled herself on the couch. She wore a white tailored linen suit, carelessly. She might be a good companion, I thought.

"I guess I take the thing too seriously, but it's more than just a business with me," I said.

"Yes?" She was watching Link put a record on the Victrola.

I tried another tack. "But I'd rather hear about you. I've often thought I'd like to teach school in the country."

Link came over to the couch. "Dance?"

She glanced at me inquiringly.

"Sure, go ahead," I said.

The older sister took her place. She had straight brown hair and wore glasses. "Do you know James Joyce?" she said.

A perverseness took hold of me. "Sure, Jimmy Joyce and I are just like that." I held up two fingers.

"Oh no, you misunderstood me, Mr Andrews. I mean have you *read* James Joyce, the writer?"

"I never heard of Jimmy Joyce, the writer," I said. "I was thinking of a Jimmy Joyce who used to run a speakeasy in New York. Do you know *him*?" I started to laugh. It seemed I was laughing nearly half the time those days. "Excuse me," I said, "but I've got to be going now."

I touched Link on the arm. "You stay and entertain the ladies."

The younger sister stopped dancing. "Oh, but why? I wanted to hear all about your paper."

I thought for a moment, watching her. Maybe she hadn't meant to be rude. Maybe I was too sensitive. "Because I've forgotten how to behave in public," I said. "I shouldn't have come out of my den in the first place. Sorry."

She followed me onto the porch. "Oh, but you shouldn't *be* that way. Why, I thought you behaved beautifully."

"Did you? It's nice of you to say so." And I went on down the road, feeling rather ashamed and a little sorry for myself and—lonely.

But the night was big—bigger than concern for myself. The moon was riding high, spreading a white film over all the slopes and declivities, dazzling upon the white fence which swept down the curve of the hill. It was a night for excitement, strange happenings.

I walked rapidly through the town's street, past the stark moon shadows cast by the flat buildings, and headed for the Carneys' place. Doris . . . there was something fascinatingly withheld about her. I wanted the answer.

She answered my knock, holding a smoking oil lamp above her head so that the light fell in a warm glow across her face. I waited silently. Perhaps she saw in my face the reason I had come, for she said quietly, "Come in, I thought it might be you."

The hall was heavily carpeted, and though it was furnished with heavy outmoded objects, it gave a semblance of warmth and luxury at variance with the outward aspect of the house. The girl placed the lamp upon a shelf beside a long mirror and paused for a moment, as though studying her own reflection. There was again that uncaptured twist of her head and body, that upward yearning.

"Father is in the sitting room," she said and led me along the hall to a heavily curtained archway.

Beside a round marble-topped table sat a man with the gentlest face I had ever seen. The lamp-light falling across his face and across his book picked out the shadows of the small, well-formed head, the delicate nose, the fine, wirelike line from cheekbone to chin. His hair was white, but his mustache had remained sandy. He must have been seventy years old.

"Father, this is the editor of the paper. He has come to talk to you."

"Yes." He looked up from his book, not with the bewildered expression of a surprised old man, but with a quick, searching look that seemed to discover me at once, eliminating the need of a gradual process of getting acquainted. He grasped a light cane and rose, a tall man, taller than I. His carriage, despite the fact that his clothes hung upon his frame, was so erect that I had the thought there must be a steel wire in him somewhere which might be bent down to earth on occasion but which would snap back to its original position as soon as the pressure was removed.

"I am pleased to know you, sir." He took my hand in a firm, brief grip. "Please sit down. Doris, I believe you will find a little wine in the dining room. Would you mind bringing it to us?"

I took the chair on the other side of the little table, a black wood chair upholstered in red plush. "I'm sorry to come calling so late, sir," I said.

"That's quite all right. I often sit up very late reading. I have just been reading again James Joyce." He held up his book. "Do you like Joyce?"

"To tell the truth, sir," I said, thinking of my boorishness half an hour before, "I'm afraid I don't quite understand Joyce. I wish I did. I've always

felt a great deficiency in my formal education. Perhaps it's partly the result of the generation I was born into. I had only two years of college, but I feel that that should have been sufficient groundwork for a better understanding of literature. As I say, I don't believe any amount of schooling could overcome a certain opportunism which is my heritage, an impatience with anything which at first eludes me."

The old gentleman leaned forward in his chair and studied me. The room was very quiet. In the hall I could hear the great grandfather's clock counting down the seconds of our lives, seconds that were then gone forever on the swing of the pendulum. "My boy, I am pleased to know you." He spoke with warmth, and the phrase sounded altogether different than when he had first uttered it. "Your thought, of course, is not original. But I have seldom heard anyone of your age summarize his own position so cruelly. You realize the unattainable, and yet you do not seem appalled. That is courageous."

"But it frightens me sometimes," I said. "I'll make the best of what knowledge I have, I'm sure. But it frightens me that I can never know the

most—the boundless scope that these other men have known. I think I'd be afraid to try too hard to break the present bonds of my mind. There might lie chaos."

"You're not afraid," the old gentleman contradicted. "You're breaking what you call your bonds hour by hour and day by day. But, just remember, no matter how much you might learn, there would be always that feeling of straining against barriers in the mind. Why, do you think these other men you speak of never experienced that feeling of being restrained? That is the misfortune of every man who tries to think."

At this moment Doris entered the room with a cut-glass decanter of red wine. When she set it on the table the lamplight glinted through it beautifully. "Oh, look," I said, and her father smiled, a quick grimace, reminiscent of her own. "The decorative value of fine wine used to be as much a reason for having it on the table as the taste. That was why it was drunk always from a plain glass, preferably cut glass. Nowadays people forget."

I felt myself smiling until my face ached, I was so glad to be with these people. "Sit down," Doris said—I had risen when she entered. "I'm going

to leave you and Father to talk a little while longer."

When she had gone the old gentleman reached forward to pour the wine. His small hands were so fragile that the light shone through the web in spots, as it did through the old wine. This, then, I thought, was one of the things I had hoped to find in Virginia. Here in this old man was the courtesy, the delicacy, the remnant of aristocracy. Not that I had had any grand pictures of the gracious Old South. But I had become impatient with the constant debunkers. Surely, I had thought, surely there must have been something that gave rise to the picture, or there would be nothing to debunk. And surely if there once had been a Southern gallant, there would be his stamp left somewhere on the earth. And now I had found it.

"I wish you every success in your venture." The old gentleman was holding his glass near his lips.

When he had drunk I raised my own glass. What I said would have sounded pompous in any sitting room I had ever known. It didn't here: "To the luck which brought me to your door."

There was a little silence then. Finally the old man said, "I am very glad to see you here for another

reason than my own pleasure in your company." He paused and seemed to be debating whether or not to continue. "I hope you will pardon me for touching on a personal matter, but I have been worried about my daughter. She sees so few people. Of course, I realize that she stays at home a great deal on my account. But she seems not to want to see anyone. She used to have friends who came to see her from the University, and one or two young men from Carterville also came. But no one has been here for the last two or perhaps three months."

He sipped his wine slowly, and I thought perhaps he had said all he wanted to on the subject. But when I started to speak, he held up his hand. "Pray pardon me, sir. My daughter and I have always been very close. We are sensitive to each other's moods, do you see? But lately I have felt that she was withdrawing more and more within herself. I have asked her repeatedly to tell me what it is. She says it is nothing. And yet . . . and yet I feel that she is in trouble!"

His voice, as he spoke of his daughter, had risen rapidly, almost, I thought, with the beginning of hysteria. His hand, I saw, was gripping the wine-

glass tightly. It trembled, and a few drops of the wine splashed on the table top.

Suddenly he leaned across the table and put his hand gently on my arm. "Young man, you might help me. I believe you have decent instincts. I am forced to make this appeal to you because I have no friend to turn to." His voice broke, and he sank back into his chair, panting softly.

Doris came quickly into the room and began patting him and smoothing his hair. "Now, Father, you mustn't upset our guest." She motioned with her head, and I left the room.

In a moment she came into the hall. "You must go. I shouldn't have let you come at all."

"I want to talk to you," I said.

"No, you can't. I won't see you again."

I put my hand on her arm. "Perhaps it would help your father. You're the one who's upsetting him."

She hesitated, and I felt that in referring to her father I had struck her a cruel blow. For a moment I had the same feeling I had had that first night as she stood on the porch—that she might crumple up if she continued to hold herself so independently.

"I only want to help you both," I said. "I'll come by the house tomorrow night. We can take a walk and talk about things."

"All right." It was almost a sob. But as I let myself out the door, I saw that she was still holding herself rigidly, her head turned up and half away.

CHAPTER NINE

WE WALKED along the old back road, and when we came to the plank bridge we stopped and sat on the railing. It was a hot night, noisy with the crickets. In the little ravine it was cooler after the long, sweating day in the shop.

I said, "Phew, it's a hard life, isn't it?" I leaned on my knees, resting for the first time that day.

Doris didn't speak, and after a while I began studying her. She was sitting upright on the rail, steadying herself with her hands. She wore the same sweater and skirt she had worn each time I had seen her, but she looked fresh. Her hair flared behind her ear crisply. She didn't seem conscious of my stare.

"What are you thinking about?" I said finally.

"Nothing. I'm just . . . Nothing."

"You're worrying all the time," I said. "Why don't you tell me what it is? Is it that letter?"

"What makes you pry so? You're always trying to dig something out of me."

I thought about that. Below us in the creek a bullfrog sounded throatily against the steady "peep-peep peep-peep" of the tadpoles. "To tell the truth," I said, "I guess I'm bored unless I can be doing something difficult or trying to find out something about a person. You interest me."

"You're funny. You're never satisfied, are you? Are you ever happy?"

"I don't know. Sometimes, just at the moment when I've completed a job or discovered an idea, then maybe I'm content. Only for a moment, though."

"Is that why you're always pressing against what you don't know?"

"I guess so," I said. "Now that I think of it, I've always been that way. When I was a boy I was miserable because I couldn't wait to grow up and start conquering the world. Now I'm impatient because I can't achieve everything overnight. It seems to me that when you know your immediate goal, you should be able to reach it immediately."

"Isn't your newspaper such a goal?"

"It's only a start," I began. "After I get this

paper in hand, I want to expand, own a whole string of them someday. Then maybe I'll go into politics. With my papers I ought to be able to get into the state senate. Next I'd go to Congress."

"My, you're ambitious." Her voice was far off, as though she spoke from the top of her mind.

"I'm sorry I'm boring you," I said. "I can't help talking about my work. If it weren't for that, what would there be?"

She turned toward me with what I thought was a gentler movement. She seemed almost to be pitying me. The whites of her eyes were very clear. "Why, there are the fields, and the smell of the air in the fall, and a fine warm room, and the books to read—oh, all the good books."

"I like those, too," I told her. "But they're not enough. You have to live with yourself, you know."

At that she jerked her head away, tossing the crisp hair off her forehead. I thought perhaps I had found a phrase to belabor her with—somehow I wanted to beat her.

"Don't you ever have trouble living with yourself?" I persisted.

"Oh, be still, can't you? Why must you devil me?"

Her voice was like a small cry, though she wasn't actually crying. Suddenly I wanted to put my arms around her and try to make her cry. I wanted to break down that iron-banded restraint which held her. I slid my hand along the rail until it touched the edge of hers. "I'm sorry," I said. "The fact is I'm lonely, and I guess you are, too. We ought to comfort each other, instead of going on with this childish offense and defense. I don't mean to be sentimental, but why can't you talk to me? Surely, I've let you see what I'm like. Why can't you do that, too?"

She slid off the rail quickly. "No, you can't. No! No! No!" She started running up the hill. She wore low-heeled shoes, and she was able to run fast and silently in the dusty road. She was halfway up the hill before I could catch her. I seized her wrist, and she struggled a moment, trying to jerk it free. Then she stopped struggling. "You wouldn't like me. Do you understand that? Now will you let me go?"

"No," I said. "Even so, that's no reason why you should be running away. Let's sit down and talk it over."

I dropped her wrist and walked into a clover field beside the road. The clover had not come up

high yet, and there was no dew on it. It would be fine to sit upon.

Under a tree I turned and saw that she had followed me. When I seated myself with my back against the tree, she dropped to the ground a little distance away, lying on her back with her hands under her head. I took a long while lighting my pipe, trying to think of something to say that would make her talk.

Finally I said, "I suppose you will now confess that you're the Scarlet Woman?" I laughed to take the sting out of the words, but I knew at once that I hadn't meant to say anything like that.

"You don't need to keep on with those tactics," she said quietly.

Far down the valley a train whistled, four long blasts, calling in the brakeman at a signal block. When the sound had died she said, "I want you to do a favor for me. I wish you would get that letter back from the policeman. I shouldn't have let him have it in the first place. Only I was angry, I guess."

"Then you know who sent it?"

"Oh, it's all too ridiculous. There was a boy in town who used to come to see me. Last spring he married this older woman. She's going to inherit

some money soon, so I don't blame him. Anyhow, I wouldn't have had him." She spoke in a quick, light tone which I thought sounded a little unnatural. "The other night this boy came around to the house. I wouldn't let him in, but I think his wife found out about it. Maybe he told her. Anyway, she's of a very jealous nature, and she's always afraid she'll lose him. I imagine she sent the letter. I don't know anyone else who would. It's really quite pathetic, don't you think? I'm sorry for the woman."

"Is that all?" I said.

"What do you mean?"

"Is that all that's bothering you?"

"Oh, it doesn't bother me," she said. "Only I wish you would get the letter. I wouldn't want her husband to find out. I don't know what he would do. It might be a mess."

"But back there in the road . . ." I said.

"Oh, that?" She laughed. "I was only trying to make you go away and stop bothering me. I do wish you'd leave me alone. It's not that I dislike you. I simply don't care to see anyone. It's a mood that makes me want to be left alone, can't you understand?" Her voice, all the time she had been

talking, had been staccato. Perhaps, I thought, she was afraid a more natural tone might betray her. I felt that she was concealing something.

"Did you love this boy?" I asked suddenly.

"Him? Oh, heavens, he's just a good-natured country boy. Why, when he came down to the University they used to make fun of him on the campus. I used to feel sorry for him, he seemed so lost." She laughed again. Again falsely, I thought.

I stood up and walked over to where she lay. I sat on the ground beside her, leaning on my arm and watching her face. Instead of turning her head away, she returned my look with a flicker of a smile about her lips—a defiant smile.

"You're not telling everything," I said, not very loudly.

"No? How do you know that?" Her eyes shifted past me to the sky.

"You're kidding yourself about something. Is it he?"

She shook her head quickly, with her own peculiar gesture. Her face was very white in the starlight and very alive. I wanted to touch her, perhaps to touch her bright hair just at the temples. I was

lonesome and so was she. . . . Again the train whistled, closer now, blowing for Carterville.

I scrambled to my feet, forcing myself to laugh. "You thought I was going to kiss you then, didn't you?" I laughed.

"No, you couldn't have! I wouldn't have let you!" She let me help her to her feet. I pulled her up by the hand. As we went across the field she stopped suddenly and started to laugh, an honest laugh this time. "God, you're egotistical, aren't you?"

"All right, let's forget it," I said, embarrassed.

When we reached her door she held out her hand, and I looked at it a moment before realizing she wanted to shake hands. "I think I can reassure your father about you," I said. "Do you want me to try?"

She thought a moment. "Perhaps he *would* believe you. If you can do that, and if you can get me the letter, I think your job will be done."

"Done?" I said. Her head was turned, and I was holding onto her hand, which she now was trying to withdraw.

"Yes. I don't think I'd better see you after that.

I'm very grateful to you, and I hope you won't be offended. But I simply can't see you."

Then she had succeeded in freeing her hand, and she ran into the house, closing the door softly. Leaving, I stopped to scratch a match on the iron deer. Damn! Just when I thought I had beaten down her guard, up it went again. . . .

CHAPTER TEN

IT WAS Monday morning again. Virgie and old man Grover were throwing in type, and Virgie was humming. Link and I were studying the *Nobles-town Gazette*, printed twelve miles north of us.

"It's terrible," he said. "No headlines, no layout, just a jumble of type."

"Yes, but look at those ads," I told him. "They've got three full pages, and I'll bet their rate is higher than ours." I went to the file and thumbed through the issues until I found our best effort to date. "Here, take this with you and show it to the merchants." As he left, I shouted, laughing, "And you'd better not come back unless you sell 'em!"

I went into the back room and watched old man Grover doddering from the stone to a rack of type. "Mr Grover, d' you think we're making any progress?"

"Now I'll tell you, Mr Andrews, sometimes it 'pears like a body ought to have four or five hands

to get along in this world. I been workin' as hard as I can for forty-five years now, and I'll be durned if I'm not further back than when I started."

The old man's pessimism seldom failed to put me in a high humor. I often asked him leading questions simply to hear one of his pronouncements.

"Don't worry, Mr Grover," I told him, "there's bound to be a reward for you somewhere. One of these days maybe we'll branch out and publish a chain of papers, and then I'll make you foreman of the composing room and you won't have anything to do except oversee your men."

Whenever I talked big, the old man always took me seriously and replied in kind. It was a game of pretend between us. "I hope that day's a-comin' soon," he said. "You know I'm always workin' for your interests. I'm always scheming how to save time and help you get out the kind of paper you want."

"I know you are, Mr Grover," I said, humoring him, "and I certainly appreciate it."

"I never done anybody dirty in my life, but, Lord knows, plenty of 'em have done me dirty," the old printer went on. "It's just like I say, if you treat me square I'll treat you square."

"I know you will, Mr Grover," and I couldn't resist picking up his phrase: "I never did anybody dirty, either."

I went back into the other room, chuckling over our manner of exchanging the compliments of the morning. "Virgie, you're so quiet. What do you do when you want to have a good time?" I asked.

"Who, me?" She looked up with her grave, open-faced smile. "Oh, I don't know. I just have a good time, anyhow. I like to listen to you and Poppa carryin' on."

"I wish I had some money," I said, thinking aloud. "I'd like to take you and Mr Grover to New York and show you a *real* good time." From the doorway I watched young Pete Starr driving his father's cow to pasture. The cow meandered down the middle of the road, its bell tinkling.

"Hi, son," I called, waving, and he waved a stick he had in his hand. "Morning, Mr Andrews."

Mr Andrews! That's what I was here, in my own little kingdom. Link and Virgie and even the old printer seemed younger than I, and I thought with satisfaction of my efforts to make them feel that the paper was as much theirs as mine and of how they had responded. All my plans, all hopes were

shared with them. They were sure that someday, somehow or other, we were to be in easy circumstances. Did they know, I wondered, how close to the margin we were running? That last week I had put off paying Link's and my board bill in order to be sure of eking out the twelve dollars for Grover and the eight for Virgie? I thought of Link's derisive laughter because I carried the NRA emblem in the paper. Hell, the twenty dollars Virgie and Grover got would equal sixty in the city. They lived in a small house, and they had plenty to eat, and the children went to school. . . .

"Virgie," I called, "I'm going downtown to call on our friend, Abe Stein. I never did find out what he thought of that ad we ran."

"Better watch out," she laughed. "He might have a gun."

The morning mail train, three baggage cars and one coach, paused at the station, its bell clanging loudly throughout the town. I waited at the post office while the single thin sack of mail was sorted. There were the usual handouts for the paper and two letters from New York—from friends. I looked at them curiously. They had come from a

foreign land. When I opened them the phrases were like a foreign language:

Everything's just the same here. . . . A couple of girls want to know what became of you. . . . Dud Grey's on the city desk now. He sends the office boy out for coffee five times a day and wears his hat in the office. He thinks he's playing The Front Page. . . . How's the Great Adventure going? We expect you back any day. . . . Judy Sage and I got drunk at Jimmy's place the other night. She's a great gal. She sends you her love. . . .

I stuffed the letters in my pocket half read. "Sorry, haven't time to answer this week." On the way out I passed Connie Logan.

"Good morning. It's hot today, isn't it?" she said.

"Yes," I said.

She had halted, half blocking the door. "I'm so sorry about the other night."

"What? Oh, forget it. I'm the one who should be sorry," I told her.

Finally I got past her. . . . Girls, Connie Logan, Doris, girls in New York. What did they matter on

a hot morning in August at the beginning of a whole new week to work?

"Good morning, Mr Stein. How's the mercantile business?"

He glanced at me and continued reading the *Sunday Times*. He was sitting in the back of his store, just as I had found him three weeks before.

I leaned on the counter and persisted in being hearty. "Well, how did you like your ad? Did you sell any dresses?"

Still he didn't answer. I glanced around the store. On every counter, over the shoes, the underwear, the women's summer dresses, were little pasteboard signs, "Sale." On each was a printed price with a line drawn through it and a lesser price written in pencil.

"I see you're having a sale. I need some socks. I take a very small size," I laughed. "Kid's size, I guess."

He threw his paper to the floor and moved behind the counter, putting it between us. "So now you think you will do me another big favor and buy something." His voice shook.

"Listen," I said, "don't misunderstand. I need the socks."

He hesitated a moment, his round brown eyes darker than his dark-skinned face. "All right, I will sell you socks." He emphasized each word. "They cost one dollar a pair. How many did you want? A dozen pair perhaps?"

"Your price tag says four for a dollar." I had gone cold now. I tried to speak as deliberately as he.

"Oh! Oh, pardon me! My mistake. I took you for someone else. For a moment I thought you were the big shot around this town, the big philanthropist. Naturally, I didn't think you would want anything but the best."

"Why, you—— What's the matter with you?" I started to leave the store.

He pursued me to the door. "D' you think I want your charity? You made me a laughingstock. Everybody is saying, 'Ho, that cheap Jew, he is too cheap to pay for an ad, but he will take one for nothing!' I should have you arrested. I should sue you. I will sue you. You—you schoolboy!"

I stood on the sidewalk and watched him in the doorway, his face working. Suddenly I started to

laugh. "You poor little monkey. That's what you look like." I went on down the street, deliberately continuing to laugh because I was afraid of what might happen if I didn't.

After lunch I was trying to write an editorial, and Virgie and Grover hadn't come back yet, when I heard a voice:

"Where might I find the proprietor?" It was one of the town's three ministers, black-garbed, black hat in hand. He was tall, thin, but his face was contradictorily plump.

"How do you do, sir. I'm the editor." I held out my hand, and he took it in a perfectly limp grasp, holding it while he peered into my face.

"I am—uh—pleased to make your acquaintance. I had not expected one so young."

"I've been printing all the church notices," I said defensively. "I presume yours were among them."

"Yes—uh—the notices have been quite satisfactory, thank you. I have come on another matter. A rather delicate matter, I might say."

I thought fast. In a country town you had to have the ministers on your side—no matter what your private opinions were. "I've been meaning to

get around to church," I said. "I've been very busy getting things started here. But I mean to get around to all three of the churches."

"I shall be glad to see you at my church, I am sure. I am Dr Beevan, the Baptist pastor. But—uh—there was another matter which I wanted to discuss with you."

"Yes?" I said. His manner was vaguely reminiscent of an unpleasant school principal I had known once.

"I see that you are a young man of the world, and that makes my—uh—task somewhat easier. To be perfectly frank, there have been complaints from several of the ladies in my congregation about a young woman who I understand is employed here."

"Well?" I said, and moved over to the door to make sure that Virgie wasn't returning.

The minister was standing in the middle of the room, facing me but not looking at me. His eyes were of a vague quality which made it hard to tell whether he was looking at anything. "The ladies of my congregation feel that this young woman is—uh—an immoral influence in the community," he continued. "They have asked me to pay this call

upon you and urge that you—uh—take the proper steps. I would suggest that you might warn her she must change her ways or—uh—face the loss of her employment.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said, hoping that I wouldn’t lose my temper, but feeling already the beginning of an uncontrollable inward trembling.

The minister nodded emphatically. “Of course you don’t! That is what I told the ladies, that you wouldn’t tolerate such goings on if you knew about them.”

“I didn’t say that,” I said. “Be specific, please.”

“Well, since you insist, I must tell you that this young woman has been seen in a compromising position, so to speak. She has been seen on a number of occasions riding in the car with the town sergeant, Mr Mason, and on two occasions ladies in my congregation have had the misfortune to come upon this car at night when it was parked on one of the streets of our town. Their report to me—and I have no reason to doubt their veracity—is that the town sergeant and this young woman were drinking from a whisky bottle and that they had their arms around one another.”

From the door I could see the Grovers' house, next door to the Boltons'. Now I saw Virgie and the old man come out and start back toward the shop.

"Another reason for bringing this matter to your attention," the minister was continuing, "is that our own town policeman is involved. Surely you can see the effect——"

"Dr Beevan," I said, "get the hell out!"

Abe Stein had made me angry that morning and I had laughed it off. But now there wasn't another laugh left in my system.

The minister's mouth had shut in a thin line, and his face had gone white. But he stood his ground.

"Will you get out or do I have to throw you out!" I yelled at him.

Then he went. "Young man, watch your step," he said, but he clapped his hat on his head and went. I watched him turn into the road, ready to run out and interfere if he tried to speak to Virgie. But he didn't. He walked rapidly down the other side of the road without looking back.

Toward evening I came upon a black hour. This day that had begun with such a fine clean slate—

see what had happened to it. Now the slate was covered with a confusion of unlovely marks. I had lost my temper. It seemed I was continually on the verge of losing my temper these days, restraining it only by going to the other extreme, keeping a fixed smile, forcing myself to speak overcourteously. Diplomacy! I was sick of it. I had used it even with Link and old man Grover and Virgie, let alone the business men. I was sick of myself, too. . . .

Now I sat by the open window, trying to reckon up what had been accomplished that day. Nothing, I thought. Dusk was coming into the field. A light in the nearest house sprang up warmly. There were people, laughing in the kitchen perhaps, comfortable after the day's toil.

Grover and Virgie had gone home an hour ago. Perhaps even they were being gay now at the supper table. I glanced around the shop, reviewing the shadowed familiar outlines of the paper cutter, the racks of type, the faint white of the file hung on the wall. Outside the little birds were uttering gentle, pleasant cries in the evening quiet. "Good old shop," I said aloud. "Good old friend."

The car, bumping across the field, broke my reverie. Link jumped out. "Hey, Jimson, you still here?"

"Yes, any luck?" I had almost forgotten Link. Now that he was here I felt better, a little ashamed of my thoughts.

"Luck?" he cried. "Boy, listen, wait till I tell you!" He switched on the light and began striding back and forth across the floor, importantly. "I went to the courthouse to see about putting in a bid for the county printing, see? And while I was talking to the clerk a big, well-dressed man came along and said, 'Are you running that paper down at Carterville?' I told him we were running it together, and he asked me a lot of questions about you, and then he said, 'I've been watching that paper, and I've noticed a big improvement lately. I wish you'd tell that young man to come and see me some evening.'"

"Who was he?" I said.

"The head of the Democratic committee. Malcolm Lord. The biggest man in the county!"

Link, on the drive back from Noblestown, must have been building up the way in which he would tell me his news, for now he stopped pacing and waited, dramatically, for me to respond.

I wouldn't have had the heart to disappoint him, even if I hadn't been excited myself. I brought the palm of my hand down on the desk with a clap. "Now we're getting somewhere! So he wants to see me, eh? What about, did he tell you?"

"He didn't say much. But I gathered his gang is at outs with the editor in Noblestown, and they're looking around for another paper to back." Link swung his arm in a wide gesture. "D' you know what that would mean? All the legal ads, all the public notices, enough to keep us in clover!"

"Maybe," I said. I went over to the paper cutter and nervously began twisting the big iron wheel used to adjust the blades. I didn't want to get too excited.

"Good Lord, what's the matter? What more do you want?" Link yelled. I never had seen him so enthusiastic.

"If only we can get it," I said. "If only . . ." I turned off the light and hooked my arm through his as we went through the door. "Come on, we'll be late for supper."

It had been a long day.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IN THE evening the townsfolk gather at the post office and await the train that brings to Carterville the Washington papers and an infrequent letter from the outside world. They wait and they stare in silence, the big-breasted, spindling girls in their tawdry long gowns and the thickset farmers whose brogans scrape against the plank floor.

I think Link and I must have been almost as much of a show as the arrival of the local that summer. Fiddling at the combination of our box, I could feel the mute eyes stabbing into my back. I was embarrassed sometimes at getting so much mail when the rest got nothing, and I wanted to tell them that what I received was, for the most part, handouts and similar trash that had no personal meaning.

It was at this time one evening that the jail next door to the post office caught fire. No one said the jail was burning, and for that matter no word at

all was uttered. But the brogans began to clump across the floor suddenly, and the door was blocked with a shoving mass.

Link and I were the last out, and as we came into the still evening, tinted by a lobster sunset, we heard the laughter of a madman and the hoarse cry, "Help! Help! I'm burning up!"

In the silence that followed that shout, a sharp crackling was audible, and though there was no flame in sight, black smoke came puffing from a high barred window on the side of the paint-peeled clapboard shack.

The crowd—there must have been fifty, all told—stood away from the building, soundlessly, doing nothing. And yet it seemed that street was filled with a bursting din. Their very silence gave that effect.

Link and I pressed to the front of the group, where Harry Mason in his trooper's uniform was standing with his hat on the back of his head—grinning. I started to ask him why he didn't do something. At that moment the smoke cleared and we caught a glimpse of a bloated face at the window and an arm stretched between the bars. "Yaaah, you yellow bastard, why don't you come and get me!"

Harry stopped grinning and moved toward the small door at the rear of the shack. The crowd surged around with him. He moved deliberately, almost leisurely, in getting out his keys and unlocking the padlock. Finally he disappeared into the smoking doorway and emerged dragging the man, who still was shouting curses and laughing madly.

As they came into the open, the prisoner clutched Harry's arm and tried to sink his teeth into it. With his free hand, the policeman jerked a little billy out of his belt and hit him over the head. Then he yelled at the bystanders, "Come on, get some water here! The damn fool's only set fire to his mattress."

He picked up the prisoner, a big man, and carried him to his Ford, which he had left in the middle of the street. He put him, unconscious, in the front seat and turned to me. "They ought never to have let him out of the asylum. That's the third time he's got drunk and set the jail on fire."

"What's the matter with him?" I said. "Is he crazy?"

"Oh, he ain't been right since he come back from the war. Used to be a smart man around here, too. Only now he gets drunk all the time and beats up

his wife and spends his disability allowance soon as he gets it." The policeman started to get in the car. "But I wouldn't put nothin' in the paper about it if I was you."

As the car started, I glanced at the veteran's wasted face. He wasn't burned, but, unconscious, his face had a ravaged look that nearly made me physically sick. I turned away quickly. The fire was out already, but the crowd lingered, still watching, still perfectly silent.

"God!" I said to Link. "Let's go back to the shop and catch a drink of corn. I'm beginning to think we must be dead and walking around in some silent hell."

CHAPTER TWELVE

FINALLY I put the half-empty Mason jar back on the desk and balanced far back in the ancient swivel chair, feeling the hot liquor slowly finding its way down my throat. Here, in the shop, the unpleasant little town seemed as far removed as New York—farther even, for to me it seemed less real.

Link reclined on top of the desk, leaning on his elbow. Now he picked up the jar in both hands. "Remember the bull sessions we used to have?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, still trying to get my mind off the sight of that war veteran's face. "You were such a hidebound Republican you used to make me mad."

"I still am," he said. "I voted for Hoover, and I'd vote for him again."

"What!" I knew he was leading me on.

"Sure, your friend Roosevelt's an opportunist, that's all."

"You only heard somebody say that," I coun-

tered, thinking. "What did Hoover ever do for you?" I asked him.

"I don't know, but he never did me any harm. I'll have to foot Roosevelt's bills someday."

"You heard somebody say that, too." In arguing with Link I had to move slowly or I'd come out loser. He had the easier side always, the negative. "Let's get our proposition clear," I said. "What you mean is that the Republicans always looked out for their buddies, the rich people, isn't that it?"

He started to grin, and I knew what he was going to say before he was half finished; it was his favorite way of taunting me: "If you had money, you'd want to protect it, too. You wouldn't talk the way you do now. You'd turn Republican in a flash."

I sipped at the raw liquor, tilting the jar gingerly, preparing to surprise him. "All right, I'll agree with you," I said. "Let's skip the usual debate about hereditary wealth. Certainly if I was rich I'd try to hold onto what I had."

"Now you're getting some sense!" Link sounded triumphant, a little smug. "I knew you'd get the right idea someday."

"But I'm still a Democrat, or a Communist, or a Socialist, or a bomb thrower," I told him.

"Oh, bunk. You're only talking theories, not practice."

"No, I mean in practice." I had been feeling for an idea, trying to find an answer for myself more than for Link. Now I thought I had it. "If I were rich," I told him, "I'd stand on the rich people's side. But I'm not rich, and neither are you. Sometimes we don't have two coins to rub together. So what's the use of thinking of ourselves as the upper class? Why isn't it more practical to line up on the side we belong on? Why not fight with the underdogs, at least until we get to be top dogs?"

"Because we weren't born on that side," Link replied. "Our families are in the middle class, even if they haven't money right now. You know yourself how you hate crowds. I don't know of anyone who hates to rub elbows with the common herd as much as you do. Why, you don't even like to go to amusement parks and places like that. You think you're too good. You're one of the worst snobs I ever met!"

"Sure," I said, "I'll admit all that. I want to make a million dollars and buy a yacht and sail as far

away from all the ugly things as I can get. I still maintain it's better right now for me to be a bomb thrower."

"I don't get you."

"Life is a battle, isn't it? All right, let's say I am born on this earth without any heritage of wealth, only the heritage of body and mind. When I come on the scene I find two armies lined up, the rich and the poor. If I enlist in the army of the rich—by taking a clerk's job in a big concern, say—I'm in a pretty safe dugout. I'm not very liable to get hurt, as long as I obey orders, peel potatoes and scrape out the garbage pails nicely. On the other hand, it's going to take me a long time to become a captain or a major, and the chances are that I'll never be more than a buck private—because commissioned officers are getting scarcer every day, owing to the concentration of wealth. But if I fight with the poor I've a good chance of becoming a general. Maybe my army won't be any bigger than this little force here on the *Piedmont Herald*. But maybe that army will grow. When it's big enough so that I can name my own terms, then it will be time enough to think about shifting over to the other side—changing my attitude, I mean."

Link was tapping against the jar with a nickel, impatient to interrupt. "But there are plenty of good noncommissioned berths in those big companies, don't forget," he said. "If you have the stuff in you, you can rise to a position that would correspond to being general of a little gang. You can become a chief clerk, or the manager of a chain store, or a headwaiter, or a city editor, or any one of a thousand things."

"That's just the point," I told him gleefully. "Who the devil wants to be a noncommissioned officer? Compare your store manager with the owner, headwaiter with proprietor, city editor with publisher. You're never your own boss no matter how high you go!"

"But, nine times out of ten, you'd be better off," Link insisted. "You wouldn't have to be worrying about the chance your store or your paper might go bankrupt. And you'd probably earn just as much money or more. Why worry about being your own boss?"

I stood up and walked around the room, looking for something. I was excited by our talk and by the liquor. Link's satisfaction with things as they are, as it always did, had made me a little wild.

Finally I picked up a column rule. We had only a few long ones, and they were cherished.

"Watch this!" I cried, and I brought the rule down hard on my knee, snapping it in two. "D' you think I would dare do that if I were an underling? Do you see why I want to be my own boss?"

Link started to laugh. "That doesn't prove anything. You're crazy, that's what."

I looked at the two pieces of the rule. I felt bad about breaking it—almost as one might feel after striking his smaller brother. Suddenly I was half angry, disgusted with Link. "Hell, man, don't you like to fight? Do you want your life all mapped out for you? Don't you want to take chances and wrestle with life, and maybe get hurt or killed, but maybe come out 'way up on top?"

I stood in the middle of the floor, teetering, seeing Link's face as a white blob that advanced and receded. The liquor in the jar had gone down to about quarter full, I noted.

"That's where I want to go," I said, waving the broken rule over my head, "'way up—not just halfway."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WALKING through the soft, heavy summer night, I seemed to be walking above it—at least above the night mists which lay over the fields to either side of the road. "Link," I said, pushing his arm, "you know, liquor's a wonderful thing. I'll bet a good drink of whisky would save many a poor devil from suicide."

"It works different ways," he said sourly. "You're too serious when you're sober. The only time you're gay is when you're half tight. With me it's just the opposite."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I guess I impose on people with my moods."

"Oh, that's all right," he replied magnanimously. "I'm used to 'em by now."

Out of the ravine to our right a huge moon was rising, blood red through the mist. "It's early yet," I said. "Let's go down to see that Carney girl." As soon as the words were out, I was sorry I had

spoken. I hoped he wouldn't decide to come with me.

"You've been taking quite an interest in her, haven't you?"

"I don't know," I told him. "She's a funny girl. I'd like to know the answer."

We had stopped in the middle of the road in front of the Boltons'. "I didn't like her," Link said. "She was too dictatorial."

"You mean because she told you to sit in the car that night?"

"Her whole attitude. She seemed to think she was too good for us."

There was an estranged silence. Both of us were looking away at the moon. I thought that Link might be hurt because I hadn't spoken of Doris before; he knew I'd been seeing her. During the years that we had known each other we had been quite frank with each other about all our girls. But now, this one . . .

"Well?" I said finally.

"Well . . ."

"Are you coming along?"

"No, thanks, I think I'll read a while and then go

to bed." He spoke stiffly and jumped the ditch, walking across the lawn toward the house. For a moment I debated following him. But it wasn't a night to be sitting indoors. Besides, I thought, he'd get over it.

"Good night," I called. As I walked on alone, I swung my arms and almost let out a whoop.

When Doris opened the door I was prepared for her reluctance, and I said quickly, "I came to have that little talk with your father."

"He's not here," she said. "He's gone down to the University Hospital for treatment. He won't be back for a month." She held the door only half open, ready to close it in a moment. In the dim lamplight from the hall I could see that she wore a plain gray dress of some rough material, dropping loosely from a silver band at the collar. The light glimmered dully on the ash gold of her hair.

"May I come in for a while?" I said, realizing my tongue was a little thick.

She shook her head quickly. "Did you get the letter?"

I told her I hadn't, but that I would in a few

days. She said, "Oh, never mind. It's not worth the trouble." Her voice seemed to hold a far-off, almost fatalistic note.

"I'm sorry about my appearance," I said. I was wearing the dirty white shirt and trousers I had worn all day at the shop. "I didn't know I was coming here. Only it was such a wonderful night . . ."

I had tried deliberately to sound forlorn, and the ruse succeeded. "Oh, come in if you must," she said, her voice warming with a little laugh.

We went into the back parlor where I had sat with her father. "Are you all alone here?" I asked her.

"Yes. Except for an old Negress who comes to clean during the day." She leaned on the mantel, slowly regarding herself in the mirror set above it.

"But you shouldn't stay alone," I said.

"Oh, what's the difference? I'm not afraid of the bogey man." She laughed, one short, sharp note, as though she were disdaining her own reflection. "I suppose you want to talk about your paper."

"No, I want to talk about you," I said. I sat in her father's chair and waited. She was behind me in the room. There was a long, slow silence.

Open on the table lay a book, *A Farewell to*

Arms. It was open near the end, at the description of the woman's death in childbirth. I picked it up and started to read. "Don't you like this?" I said, half turning in the chair.

She had been looking at herself all the time. Now, when she saw what I was doing, she moved quickly and took the book from my hands. "Let's not talk about it," she said.

"All right, but I don't understand," I said.

She stood on the other side of the table, her face in the shadow above the lampshade. I could not see her expression. "I'm sorry. There's no way you could understand, I suppose," she said. In a moment she sat down, her face composed. "Tell me about your girls, the girls you had where you came from."

"I don't know. . . . There weren't a great many," I said.

"Well, tell me," she insisted. She seemed genuinely interested in something for the first time since I had met her. "How did you feel about them? Did you simply take them when you were interested and then forget about them? Tell me how a man feels."

I thought a moment, deciding it would please

her if I answered as sincerely as I could. "I don't know how other men feel about girls," I said. "Sometimes I think I have the wrong attitude. I've never been interested in more than one girl at a time, and I take her too seriously—almost as seriously as my work."

And, because she was easy to talk to, I began to tell her about the two girls I had known. "There was one named Jill in the place where I went to high school. She was a delicate blonde. She had small hands and feet and she carried her head aloofly. She was like you in a way—she never let people get near her. Only in a way she was different. That was her natural character. With you I suspect there's a reason. . . . Anyway, Jill was the only girl I thought about all through high school and during the first year I spent at college. She never let me kiss her, and I never tried very hard. I suppose one of the reasons I liked her was that she never gave in. I thought of her as a sort of shining ideal—you know, schoolboy stuff."

I laughed as though I were embarrassed. But I wasn't embarrassed actually. Somehow I knew Doris wouldn't laugh at my story. "I used to spend all the money I could get to take her to gay places,"

I went on. "She didn't seem particularly grateful, and I liked that, too. I liked her taking things for granted. Only there was one thing about her that I couldn't understand. I used to take all my accomplishments to her. I wanted to show her that I was worthy of her, I suppose. But she never seemed to appreciate that. I remember when I was made editor of the school paper. I took her the first issue. I remember standing in her parlor and waiting for her face to light up, or at least for her to make some gesture. But she looked at the paper without reading it, and then she threw it on the sofa. 'That's very nice, Jimson,' she said. Just that—'very nice.' Then she started talking about a bridge game. When I left her that day, I was sure I'd never go back. But I did, of course."

"And what finally happened? Did you finally give up the struggle?" I felt Doris watching my face closely. I wasn't looking at her as I talked.

"I think she finally did something that changed my idea of her," I said, trying to be truthful. "I had thought her aloofness was part of a high personal integrity. One Christmas vacation when I was home from college, I asked her to a New Year's Eve party at my house. I think she knew I was

giving the party mainly for her. Anyway, she said she'd like to come, and I told my friends that she'd be there. When I called for her that night I took her some flowers. She was as beautiful as I had ever seen her. As I remember, she had on an evening gown that was all shining silver. Before we went out to the car I talked with her mother and father a minute. They seemed to like me."

I paused, going over the details of the incident in memory. Whenever I told this story I tried to be accurate. It was hard to realize I hadn't imagined it.

"Well?" Doris said.

"We got in the car. When we had gone a few blocks she asked me to stop. Then she told me she wasn't going to the party. It seemed she had a date with another fellow, but her father didn't approve of him. So she had used me as a means of getting out of the house. She wanted me to take her to a drugstore where he would be waiting. 'You don't really mind, do you?' she said. 'You're such an *old* friend of mine that I knew you wouldn't mind doing this.' At the time I felt rather sick, as though someone had hit me in the stomach. But after I let her out of the car, I remember heaving a sigh—

almost of relief. After that she was never the same person to me, I guess."

"And you had been taking her out for how many years?"

"About five," I said.

Doris sat very quiet, looking straight before her. Watching her now, I thought there was a brave quality about her profile, and again I wanted to reach out and touch her hair where it grew thin and wispy at the temples. Around us the old, empty house, creaking faintly, seemed to form the circumference of a little world of our own, far removed from that other world.

"And the other?" Her voice was low, almost gentle.

"The other worked on a newspaper. She thought reporting was the most important thing in the world, more important than living itself. So did I at first. Then I found out it was just an ordinary job, like bookkeeping or anything else. I tried to tell her about a change in perspective. She said it wasn't that. She said the trouble was that I couldn't grasp realities—that I was a mere shadow of a being. I accused her of exactly the same thing. Finally I left that paper."



As I finished speaking, Doris left the room quietly and returned in a moment with the decanter from which her father and I had drunk. It was her first hospitable gesture, and I was surprised.

"I think you've earned a little refreshment," she said, laughing. Somehow the veil seemed to be slipping, and I thought that her face, smiling, was like magic. I stood leaning against the mantel, holding the glass she had given me.

Standing by the table, she sipped the wine, watching me over her glass, her eyes smiling. Finally she spoke, "Do you know, you're strange, aren't you?"

I don't know how to describe it, but something seemed to be happening in the room. It was as though a third presence had sprung up where our eyes met. One quick movement or a harsh sound, I felt, and the presence would vanish—punctured like a balloon.

Still watching her, I laid my own glass on the mantel behind me. At the same time, she set hers on the table. I took her hands, first one and then the other. We stood like that for some time. Outside, beneath the open window, the katydids chanted rhythmically. My own blood got to

pounding in my temples with the same beat. One of my feet tingled, as though it had been asleep.

Finally I had to speak. "You . . ."

The presence fled. She twisted her hands free and walked to the other side of the table. Once more her head was turned up and half away, her body taut in an upward, desperate defiance.

"But why?" I said. "You've got to tell me now."

"If only I could!" Her voice broke near a sob. Then she put her hand on the edge of the table, gripping the marble slab. "You must go. I have to think. You must!"

"All right," I told her. "I'll come back in a few days."

As I let myself out of the house, my head ached fiercely. A single moment had sobered me, and now I had a hangover.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

RAIN came with day, graying over the open window and setting up a shout outside. Mrs Bolton was knocking at the door and calling, "Mr Andrews, six o'clock. Six o'clock, Mr Andrews." Her voice, as always, gave me the impression of a woman smiling through pain. "All right," I called and ordered my body out of bed.

The dining room, with its square golden-oak furniture, was damp. Even on the hottest day this house never seemed to dry out. I went into the kitchen and watched Mrs Bolton leaning over the iron cookstove. "You needn't call Link," I told her. "Might as well let him get some sleep."

She set my breakfast on the kitchen table. "You shouldn't work so hard. You'll be old soon enough."

"How about yourself?" I said, and she laughed, briefly.

As I started to leave, she insisted that I take one of Mr Bolton's old slickers. The hard drops in my

face woke me, and worry came back. It was the kind of day for worrying.

Alone in the shop, I tried to balance the budget. It was getting to be such an old refrain that I scarcely needed to write the items on a scrap of paper: newsprint, seven dollars; Grover's and Virgie's salaries, twenty; Link's and my board, fourteen; gas for the car, three; electricity, three; ink, two; mailing, two; miscellaneous, four; total, fifty-five.

Again I began summing up the money due the paper. Even if we collected all of it, it wouldn't amount to more than fifty dollars that week, since most of the advertisers wouldn't pay until the end of the month. I drew out my wallet. A lone five-dollar bill remained. That, plus the money I might be able to collect, would barely meet expenses on Saturday, payday.

But what about the next week? We'd have to begin all over again, trying to sell ads—and our margin of safety would have been wiped out completely. Then, too, there was Mayor Bixby. He would have to be paid the day his money fell due. I knew that only too well.

I went back to the expense sheet and tried to

find something I could pare down. But, as I studied it, I could see only the items that weren't there and should have been. Where were Link's and my salaries? Were our efforts worth nothing?

I crumbled up the figures and went over to the far wall where I'd put up a homemade rack to serve as a file. There were eight issues on the file now, and turning the pages, I tried to regard them impersonally and to see that they weren't worth the sweat and worry that had gone into them in the last two months.

There were stories about the Sunday-school carnival, and the bolt of lightning that had struck the power house, and the new postmaster taking office, and the paving of the town's main street (an epochal event, I had called it editorially and with much secret laughter), and the fist fight that Doug Corum and Bud Coppage had one Saturday night, and a feature story about the thirteen-year-old girl who operated the switchboard (there were only eight telephones in town), and the duplication in the county relief rolls which Link had uncovered, together with an exposé of a convict camp nearby (Link nearly got shot for his pains), and all the columns and columns of social notes

which Virgie and old man Grover so patiently had dignified with type—"The Missionary Society of the Baptist Union met Thursday at the home of Mrs Frank Smith. Among those present were . . ."

Every line, even the smallest social item, had been edited, set up and proofread with a scrupulous care. And what had come of it? Fourteen readers had sent in one dollar for a year's subscription. Fourteen out of two thousand! But patience, I told myself, countryfolk have to get used to a thing before they'll believe it. Maybe they thought the paper wouldn't last a year. Well, maybe they were right.

I hung the file back on the wall and started opening the pile of letters on my desk. It was the same old conglomeration—handouts, propaganda, bunk! Well, they couldn't fool me. I'd show 'em, by George! I pulled the cover off the typewriter and started pecking away at an editorial:

NOT SO GULLIBLE

It is to laugh at the efforts of certain anti-Administration interests to slip one over on the unsuspecting country editor.

Each mail brings a pile of anti-Roosevelt pub-

licity large enough to provide stove kindling for an entire winter. Not that these handouts—as publicity releases are called—are frankly propaganda. They are gotten up for use in rural papers as “news” stories.

Indeed, the editor is supposed to get the idea that someone is doing him a free service.

The heading of each handout is quite newsy. It says: “INDUSTRIAL NEWS SERVICE, Industrial News Affecting the Nation’s Welfare.” And the first paragraph or two of the article is written in a newsy fashion.

The National Association of Manufacturers, with headquarters in Washington, D. C., gets out these handouts, and no doubt that organization hires a high-powered staff of stenographers, trained writers and fact-and-figure compilers to furnish the country editor with reports.

The assumption must be that no country editor has time to read beyond the first paragraph and that, in the belief he has come upon a handy bit of news, he will insert the article as is.

For example, the lead of one article in this week’s mail announces, innocuously enough, that the “National Recovery Administration

and the Federal Trade Commission may become one as the solution of how to extend the life of the NRA."

But in the fourth paragraph of the same article the reader is informed—without apparent connection to the subject under discussion—that "private industry is being ridden so hard by government bureaucracy it is saddlesore."

It is at this point that the National Association of Manufacturers presumes on the intelligence even of a poor country editor.

If this paper wants to editorialize against the New Deal, it is well able to do so without the help of the manufacturers' trained seals. The manufacturers' efforts to sneak propaganda into the news columns are indeed a skillful art to behold—but the art is not appreciated in this quarter.

There! I put in the paragraph markings and spiked the copy on top of the pile Virgie and Grover would set. For a moment I wondered if I was becoming a spiteful example of a defeated hopper, too weak to cope with the "rugged individualists." But no, as I had told Link, I was a rugged

individualist myself. What I had said editorially merely was an honest blow, no matter how puny, at forces which I believed were crushing me. Moreover, it was a sincere blow, no matter what else might be said of it. . . .

The door was pushed open violently, and a heavy-set woman of about forty, wearing a trench coat, came in. I recognized her as Mrs Wesley Gordon, wife of the owner of the mill, and the town's social leader. She was a bluff, horsy woman.

"Morning," she cried. "Fine rain. Farmers need it."

I nodded. "Yes, ma'am."

She looked around the room, taking stock, and, boyishly, I wished Virgie and Grover and Link were there, so that she could see I had some authority.

"What's your subscription rate? I want to take the paper," she said.

When I told her the rate was a dollar a year, she snorted. "You ought to ask more. Suppose you put me down for a five-year subscription."

Suddenly I felt a warm flush sweep over my body. Here was real encouragement—the first. "It's very kind of you," I said, "but I'm afraid I

can't let you subscribe for more than one year. I may not be here five years."

"Oh, bosh!" Then she began to smile. "See here, you shouldn't hide out so much. I'd like you to meet my daughters."

So, I thought! There was a dearth of eligible young men in Carterville. But I liked her just the same. "I'm sorry," I said. "I haven't time for a social life at present. Maybe later when things are better organized here——"

"Nonsense. What do you do that takes so much time?"

I started to laugh. "Well . . ." Then I took her around the shop, showing her the antique equipment and trying to give her a picture of the business. She seemed to understand readily. As she was leaving, she opened her purse and took out a five-dollar bill.

"Madam," I said, enjoying the situation, "I would be honored to send you a complimentary copy every week, as long as I remain here."

She hesitated, and then she seemed to understand what the gesture meant to me. She put the money back in her purse and held out her gloved hand. As she plunged into the rain, her last word brightened the room: "Good luck!"

Old man Grover came in and found me again reading the files that had seemed so inadequate an hour before. "Mr Grover," I said, "do you know we're making history here?"

He grunted, "Ho, you could give these people forty pages a week and they'd still find somethin' to criticize. I mind one woman that used to come in here. 'Oh, Mr Grover,' she says, 'I never knew you had to pick up *each* little piece of type. I never knew you did all *that* work.' "

"I'm afraid you're just an embittered old cynic," I laughed as he limped to his corner and scowled at the copy piled there.

"I'd a-been here earlier, only my gout's been givin' me hell again," he mumbled.

Virgie and Link came in, and we all got to work. It was publication day again, and there was plenty to be done.

Link seemed to be catching the spirit of the job at last. He folded an old newspaper into a square hat, such as pressmen on city papers wear, and rubbed some grease on it. He walked around the shop in his undershirt, talking tough and declaring he was foreman of the pressroom and he'd fight anybody who said he wasn't. He kept shouting

orders to a mythical gang of men as he labored to get last week's forms off the press and make way for new ones.

We laughed a lot, and the morning was gone before we knew it.

After lunch the old fight against time began. The printer's rheumatism was so bad that he could make but slow progress. Virgie had to set most of the type.

But it seemed everyone wanted to help that day. Harry Mason dropped in to give us a bit of news about an auto accident, and later young Doc Cary came to tell me who had been sick that week, and finally, toward evening, all three of the Bolton girls appeared to ask if they couldn't help in folding the papers when we got them run off.

I let Link entertain our "company" while I kept plugging away at the ads in the back room and occasionally encouraging old man Grover. With the voices and laughter in the front room and the steady beat of rain on the tin roof, the little place became quite gay, but the old printer grumbled, "Huh, a printin' office is no place to be havin' a party. First thing you know they'll be wreckin' the place."

"Yes, Mr Grover, that's right, Mr Grover," I said. What I meant to say was, "All right, but *please* keep that type moving, you poor, worn-out old devil."

By the time the Miami Special went wailing past the shop we had the first four pages on the press, ready for Link to start running them after supper. The rain had ceased about five o'clock, leaving the whole countryside bursting with foliage, revived after the week's dry spell. The sun, setting in the clean new world, painted the retreating clouds red and light pink and then violet as dusk came on.

Working beside Grover after supper, while Link thrashed the press back and forth, I kept joshing the old man to keep up his spirits, and he responded with the perpetual grumbling that was his form of humor and which I enjoyed.

"When you've seen as much as I have," he would say, "it seems like you can't have any faith in folks. Take some of 'em in this town that go to church every Wednesday night and sing and pray and think they're goin' up to heaven. Bah! If they're the ones that are goin' Up Yonder, all I got to say is I'd just as soon go to the other place."

"That's the truth, Mr Grover," I egged him on.

"They go to church one day, and then the next day they come around and try to do you out of a dollar. Why, I've seen 'em come in here when they ain't paid their subscriptions in a year and say, 'Are you *sure* I owe you somethin'? Maybe you better look at your books again.' Yes, sir, it 'pears to me they think they're so smart if the Good Lord took 'em Up Yonder they'd look around and say, 'This place ain't so much. Send me back to Carterville.' "

"But you wouldn't say that, eh, Mr Grover?"

"Me? Say, if I ever got Up Yonder and they tried to send me back, I'd tell 'em I'd rather go to the Bad Place any day."

And so it went—on into the night. Finally, about ten o'clock, I told Grover and Virgie to go home. There was considerable copy they hadn't set, but I thought I'd have enough to fill the pages somehow.

Link had finished printing the first four pages, and he came over to the stone, laughing. "What the hell is holding up the works, Mr Editor? The first run is off and the pressroom is waiting."

"Go back and sleep on your damned press," I told him. "You'll be lucky if you get the next run

by daybreak." A tremendous lassitude had come down over my eyelids suddenly, and I had to keep shaking my head to stay awake. Link brought in the Mason jar, and we each took a swig of the corn. That seemed to help a little.

When I had used up all the type Grover and Virgie had set, there were still several gaping holes in the pages. I began scrambling in the boxes and barrels of junk for metal plates—anything to use as filler. Finally I dug up a cartoon that had been used by some previous editor and discarded. I scraped off the dust and dried ink. It was an old-fashioned picture of Uncle Sam with a long beard, shaking a big stick. For all I knew, it might have been used during Teddy Roosevelt's "trust-busting" campaign.

Well, it would have to do. I got out a rusty hack saw and laboriously cut off the old captions, which were too blurred to read. Then I laboriously managed to set up some new captions, indicating that this was Franklin D. Roosevelt threatening to "drive the money changers from the temple."

I stuck the thing in the middle of the front page, and then I started to laugh. The whisky, in addition to my being so tired, must have given me

a laughing jag, for Link woke up and found me sitting on the edge of the stone, chuckling and giggling helplessly.

Together we began lifting the forms onto the press. We got three of them on safely—which, of course, made what happened to the last one seem so much more unfair. Halfway between the stone and the press, I heard type beginning to drop on the floor and, looking down, saw that one of the wooden locks had slipped and the whole page was about to fall out of the form.

There wasn't much we could do. I yelled to Link, and we lowered the form to the floor before everything could slip. But one whole ad was gone!

It meant we couldn't go to press that night. I knew I didn't have the will left to set the ad again. I walked to the back door. The night had come on clear after the rain, and the air was silken.

Suddenly I shouted into that quiet night, ripping it to pieces, "God damn it to hell!"

I would have shouted again, but Link clapped his hand over my mouth, and we struggled for a moment. Finally I quieted down and started home with him.

As we went across the field, I kept trying to ex-

plain why I had lost control so completely: "It's just the idea that we're half killing ourselves to try and do a good job without adequate equipment, Link, and somewhere in the world tonight there are people who never did a lick of work in their lives, enjoying all the things that money can buy, and I just don't see where there's any God damn justice in it . . ."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IT IS uphill from Carterville to Noblestown. Link and I had set out after dinner, bounding along in the faithful old Ford. When we topped the last rise and swung into the county seat, I took my foot off the accelerator and said, "Boy!" For Noblestown, at dusk, was all I had wanted Carterville to be. Here was a town of trees, situated at the very crest of a small mountain. Through the leaves lights twinkled. On the sidewalks people strolled and stopped and talked softly against the evening quiet and strolled on their way.

"How would you like to have the paper in this town?" Link said, and I said, "Why not? Anything's possible."

A mile or so beyond the town, on another hill, we came to Malcolm Lord's place—a broad stone house surrounded by a sweep of meadow bordered with curving white fences. I shut off the motor quickly. The noise seemed alien to this gentle mansion flung up near the sky.

A Negro maid led us into the parlor. In the shadows at the end of the room someone was playing the piano softly. In a moment the playing stopped, and a tall man with a massive head came toward us. "Well, Mr Andrews, I'm glad you finally decided to come and see me," he said. He extended his hand cordially.

"I'm sorry I couldn't come sooner. I had to get out this week's paper," I said.

I was surprised. Here was no political boss as I had known them in cities. Malcolm Lord did not seem sharp. His slow, brown eyes seemed to dream, rather than to calculate. He wore a clean linen suit, not too well pressed.

"Let's sit on the terrace," he suggested. "The moon will be rising soon." He spoke perfectly naturally, as though watching the moon rise were the most usual thing in the world. Through the deepening dusk he led the way to a group of wicker chairs placed on a little eminence beside the house. From there the lights of Noblestown were visible, twinkling across the hollow.

We took our seats, Link and I, and waited. I felt somewhat as though I were walking on eggs, so much hung on this interview. I wanted to appear

as old as possible, and yet I wondered if it wouldn't be better not to pretend with this man. "This is a beautiful spot," I said finally. "The kind of place I'd like to have someday."

"I picked it out when I was about your age," the politician said slowly—and I was glad I hadn't pretended. "I remember I was working as a clerk in the bank over in the town there. I used to walk out here in the evening and stand where we are sitting now, looking back at the town and imagining that I owned this site. It seemed for a while that I would never get it, and I was impatient." He laughed. "I used to be afraid someone else would build a house here first. But finally I managed to buy one acre, and I built a shack on it. It was five or six years after that before I could begin building the house. How well I remember the day when I rolled the first big stone into place. . . ." He paused and slowly lighted a cigar, offering one to Link and me. "You must excuse me for talking about this place. It is very dear to me. Tell me, how do you like the country?"

I thought the politician had spoken as he had deliberately to put us at our ease. It was a courteous gesture, like being the first to disarm, and I was a little ashamed of my own reticence.

"I like it very well," I said, and I began to disarm, too. "I'd like it better, I think, if I owned a bit of land. When I worked in the cities, roving from one newspaper to another, I became filled with a sense of futility. Each week found me with no more to show than the week before. Perhaps I might have saved a few dollars, yes, but that wasn't tangible. How can a little money in the bank, an expensive rented apartment, compare with owning the land one stands on? Perhaps I might have started buying a home in the suburbs. But somehow any home which I could have afforded, jostled up against its neighbor, did not seem like land, not like earth. Though I suppose everyone probably feels that way."

"I don't know," the politician said. "Too many of our young men are going away to the cities." The tip of his cigar moved in the darkness, which now had descended completely. "They feel there is more opportunity there. The fact is, there is more opportunity here. Only in the country you must have a different attitude. You cannot go hunting for a job. You must make your own job."

"We were talking about that the other night, Mr Lord. That's what my partner thinks." Link

interrupted, and I wished he hadn't spoken. Somehow his ingratiating comment jarred on the conversation.

The politician's cigar moved again. "It will take time, you know. It took me twenty-five years, with the help of my wife, to make this place into what you see now, and we're not finished yet."

"Yes, sir," I said, "that's just the trouble. We're fighting for time. I'm afraid we're not going to be able to hold out long enough."

"How do you mean?" he asked, practically.

There in the peaceful night, with the sweet smell of grass all around us and the smell of hay in the field beyond, I hated to speak of business. I wanted to go on talking pleasantly and easily with this man, as though we were friends. But I had to come down to earth. I had to!

"Mr Lord," I said, "here is our position: I left a newspaper job in New York and came down here two months ago with about a hundred and fifty dollars. Now that's all gone. I had hoped to make the paper pay for itself from the outset, and I have—on paper. But I can't collect what is owed us. The merchants who advertise are used to letting their bills run six months, a year, two years.

Some of the bills, I know now, can never be collected. Yet I can't run my own business on credit. The man who owns the paper, Mayor Bixby, won't let us continue if we can't meet the next installment, which is due this week. And at the moment I don't see where I'm going to raise the money."

"How old are you, Andrews, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Twenty-three," I said.

The politician was silent then—a long silence of suspense for me. On the other hill the lights glistened through a faint mist. . . . Well, I'd shot my bolt as best I could. Let it ride.

Then Malcolm Lord was saying, "I liked some of your editorials. This is a Democratic section, you know. I wonder if you would write a little editorial for me? The paper in Noblestown has been attacking the board of supervisors. I wonder if you would care to present our side of the picture?"

I wondered, too. Would this be selling out the paper, my own independence? And yet we had to do something. "If you will give me the facts," I said.

"I'll send you a memorandum next week." The

politician rose and walked with us toward the car. "I hope you can hang on another week or so. I won't make any promises, but perhaps something can be done."

"Yes, sir," I said, and, excited, I barked my shin on the running board.

On the way back Link and I had an argument.

"You certainly told that man everything," he said critically.

"What do you mean?" I asked him, worried myself about the interview.

"Well, wouldn't it have been better if you had made him think you were more of a big shot? You didn't have to tell him what a tough spot we're in. You should have made him think *you* were doing *him* a favor. And you didn't have to tell him your true age, did you?"

We were driving with the top down. On all sides one could feel the country lying open, fresh and clean in the darkness. Link's thought didn't seem to fit the night. It was like a fly buzzing in a spacious room.

"When are you going to get over those phony notions of big business?" I asked him, irritably.

"All that high-pressure salesmanship, that constant desire to keep up a front—that went out with Hoover. This is a franker day. P. T. Barnum, the bond salesman and the *Saturday Evening Post* are losing caste."

"So you say?" he jeered. "I don't see that you're getting ahead very fast with this frankness you're always preaching about. You're too naïve—don't you know that?"

I thought for a moment. Suddenly I recalled a story Link had once related to me with glee. It seemed his family owed the neighborhood grocer several hundred dollars. One day Link's father had called on the man and magnanimously offered to settle for half the bill, and the man had accepted—he had been so afraid he would get nothing. It was a great stroke of business, Link and his father had thought. The grocer, after all, wasn't in their class.

Climbing a hill, I trod viciously on the accelerator. "Maybe you're right, Link. No doubt, it's a wonderful feeling to put something over on someone. I guess I'll have to start trying it."

"You needn't act so damn virtuous. I'll bet you muffed the opportunity of a lifetime tonight."

"Well . . . I don't know," I said. Off there in

the night the country lay clean and open. Behind us, on top of a hill, lived a man with a massive head and a courteous manner. He had shaken hands with us, a firm, honest grip. . . . "I won't promise anything." And yet . . . and yet I felt that he was my friend now.

"Oh, let's forget it," I said to Link as we turned off the highway at Carterville.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE letter, crumpled into a ball, bounced across the desk after it left my hand and rolled under a case of type. But it was still in view—accusingly. After a while I smoothed it out and read it again. Of course, I'd been expecting it:

Dear Mr Andrews: As you know, your monthly installment is due now. Recently I have had several cash offers for the paper. I regret, therefore, to inform you that unless you can meet your obligation at once I shall have to sell.

William T. Bixby.

Several cash offers! It didn't seem possible. It was a Wednesday morning, and old man Grover and I were alone in the shop. He was puttering around in the back room. "Did anyone ever offer to buy this paper for cash, as long as you can remember?" I asked him.

He methodically fitted a broken rule into the rule case. "Cash? Ho, course it's none of my business, but it 'pears to me like you better get that idea out of your head, Mr Andrews. Mr Simmons, he was always talkin' about selling the paper, but there ain't nobody that's big enough fool to pay out cash for this pile of junk. I used to tell Mr Simmons he better stop dreamin' and come down to earth."

"I wasn't thinking of selling," I said, "only Mayor Bixby says he has several cash buyers in prospect."

"Poof, poof! So Brother Bixby's up to his old tricks, eh? You just tell Brother Bixby, if he's got somebody that wants to buy this paper, to go ahead and sell it to 'em. It's funny none of 'em have been around to look at the place."

But I couldn't call Bixby's bluff. I didn't dare. I sat at the desk a long while, trying to think. Outside, the morning sun beat down so brightly it etched the trees, the farms, the crest of the hill in hard, cruel lines. Somewhere, though, somewhere there must be a way out. . . .

"Mr Grover," I called, "tell Link that I've gone to Fredericksburg and won't be back till late."

Getting in the car, I noticed a tear in the leather seat, a crack in the windshield. It was a faithful old car, I thought.

On the way to Fredericksburg, I kept thinking of the people who were in one way or another depending on my staying in Carterville—old man Grover and Virgie and Link and now even Malcolm Lord. I thought of Doris and lastly of the thing I was trying to make there, a newspaper. After I left, it would slump back into the old anonymity. That seemed somewhat like letting a child die before it had attained half the things life promised. . . . Damn Bixby! A crazy jingle ran through my head:

*You'll never get rich
diggin' a ditch,
Oh, damn the idle rich!*

Just outside Fredericksburg I drew the car off the highway. I found a dirty rag and tried to wipe some of the thick, clayey dust off the paint. Rain and wind had caked the dirt, and rubbing only smeared it. Finally I decided it wouldn't make much difference if the car was dirty. I drove on

into town and parked in front of the Central Garage.

A man was tilted back in a round-bottomed chair in the shade of the entryway. He watched me approach, and I was conscious of the grease stains on my trousers and that I needed a shave.

"Want to buy a car?" I said.

"Nope." He was a lean man, and he squinted his eyes as he spoke. Now he unclasped a pocketknife and started paring his nails.

"Don't you buy cars?" I asked him.

"Yeah, sometimes. But not that one."

"Listen," I said, "that's a 1932 model, and when it's cleaned up it looks swell."

"Mebbe so. It's got no book value, though."

I started to turn away, half glad that he wouldn't buy, but I realized this probably was his trading technique. "I'll sell it dirt cheap," I told him.

"Yeah? How much?" He went on paring his nails.

I took a wild guess: "A hundred dollars."

He didn't speak at once, and I thought perhaps he hadn't heard me. At last he said, "Well, I'll tell you, son, I got a kid that's been after me to get him a roadster, so I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give

you fifty, and that's twice what your old crate's worth."

I knew there was no use arguing. I had paid two hundred for the car less than a year ago, but right now cash meant everything. "All right, it's a deal," I told him.

We went into his office, and I signed the necessary papers. As he counted the money into my hand, I forgot all about losing the car in the excitement of imagining how I would walk into Bixby's office and lay the thirty-five dollars on his desk and say, "Give me a receipt, please."

But when I went outside and looked at the old car for the last time, I felt bad. It seemed hard to believe that I couldn't step over the door without bothering to open it, as I had so many times, and drive back to Carterville. I put my hand on the warm metal fender, experiencing the feeling which every car owner gets, I suppose—a hope the next master would be kind to her. . . . "Well, good-by, old Lizzie." I walked down the block rapidly until I had turned the corner.

I made several half-hearted attempts to sell ads. But the merchants told me they were waiting for

their fall stocks to arrive—"Come around next month. Things will be picking up then." It was an old story, but I was too depressed to argue with them.

Late in the afternoon I walked out to the edge of town and waited for a car to pass. Finally a farmer in a Ford truck stopped, and we went chugging up the hills toward "home." About a mile from Carterville he let me out. Darkness had fallen as I tramped into the little town. The night was fragrant with the smell of hay that had been cut in the fields that day. In the shop a light burned. . . . Perhaps Link had waited for me before going to supper. He was the only person I cared to see just then, I felt so tired and hopeless.

Crossing the field, I saw his figure in the doorway. "Is that you, Jimson?" he called. "Did the car break down?" His voice sounded eager, as though he were excited about something.

"I sold it," I said.

"Well, listen," he said, "I don't know what it's all about, but there's a long-distance call for you from Richmond. You'd better go over to the switchboard and see about it."

"Richmond?" I said. "I don't know anybody in Richmond."

We cut across fields to the house where, in the parlor, the thirteen-year-old girl about whom I had written a feature story tended the antiquated phone system. She was a slender little girl with eyes so big they seemed to obscure her face. In the story, I had tried to picture her as allowing her imagination to travel out over the wires, visualizing people and places she never had seen and probably never would see—Richmond and Charlottesville and Washington.

Now she ground the crank on the side of the board, asking the operator in Warrenton to put through the call. Then we had to wait about half an hour while the Warrenton operator tried to make the connection.

Finally the little bell began to tinkle and we could hear the Warrenton operator calling, "Carterville, Carterville . . . all right, go ahead, Richmond."

I took the receiver and heard a man's voice, very faintly: "I want to speak to Mr Jimson Andrews, please."

"Yes, sir, this is he," I said.

"Hello, this is Donald Falconer, executive secretary of the state Democratic committee. Mr An-

drews, I wonder if you could come down here and see me next Saturday. Mr Lord has been telling me about your paper, and I'd like to have a little chat with you about your plans."

"I'd be delighted to come, Mr Falconer." My voice trembled so the words scarcely would take shape.

"Very well, then. I'll expect you Saturday. Good-by."

"Good-by, sir."

I hung up the receiver and leaned against the switchboard. Behind me Link was saying, "Well, what is it, what is it?"

"The big chance," I said, and as we left the house, I punched him in the ribs and said, "I guess we're not licked yet, eh?"

Mrs Bolton had been keeping our supper in the oven. When we told her about the phone call, her eyes lighted up and she seemed as excited as we were. "I just knew somebody 'd be hearing about you boys," she exclaimed. "I just knew it!"

I loved Mrs Bolton then, and in fact I loved the whole world.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ONLY a few of the houses in Carterville have modern conveniences. The Boltons' had none. In the morning I poured cold water in the bowl and tried to shave. Through the window I could see Kay Bolton, standing in the middle of the yard, scattering chicken feed over the bare, packed ground. I fell to thinking of tiled bathrooms, hot showers. . . . Well, if Kay Bolton could stand it, so could I.

In the kitchen Mrs Bolton put my breakfast on the table, smiling as always. "You're up late this morning," she said. The eggs, fried an hour before, had been kept in a pan of grease. A thin coating of brown grease trickled off them onto the plate. The fried ham was cold, too.

I watched Mrs Bolton standing by the stove. I wished she would tell me what she was thinking. But she never did. "Well, tomorrow's the big day," I said.

"Yes." She held her hands clasped before her. "I just know everything will turn out fine for you. I just *know* it." For a moment I thought I saw some hidden spark flicker in her wrinkled, anxious face. I wanted to tell her how much I appreciated her faith in me, almost a mother's faith in a son.

"Mrs Bolton, you've been awfully kind to us," I said. But that sounded hollow, insincere. "If this interview in Richmond turns out well, I'm going to buy you a present. What would you like to have?"

"Oh, now, Mr Andrews!" She rattled the pots on the stove, embarrassed.

"Just suppose you could have anything you wanted," I persisted. "What would it be?"

"Well, the girls would like some fine clothes. Peggy is always reading those fashion magazines."

"No, I mean for yourself."

"I declare, I don't know." She stooped over the woodbox. "A radio. Yes, I'd like a radio to listen to sometimes."

"I'll get you one," I told her. "Maybe it won't be this year. But one day surely . . ."

At the post office there was a letter from my father:

You have grown so far away from us in the last few years. I wish I could help you. Why do you write that you don't want me to help you? But I do know. It's your battle, isn't it?

And from my mother:

The country air ought to do you good. You need to build up your health. You were down to skin and bone when I last saw you. I hope you're not drinking as much as you did last winter.

Well, it was good to know one wasn't alone in the world. . . . I kicked at an ancient iron post, where once horses had been tied, where a horse occasionally was tied still. "Hell, I must be getting soft." I was thinking of how I had been homesick before breakfast.

At the office Link and old man Grover were folding papers, and Virgie was addressing them in pencil. Old man Grover would fold the paper methodically in half, run his palm along the crease, fold again, crease again. He moved as regularly as

a machine. There was a pile of folded papers beside him.

Link, as usual, was experimenting. He had folded four papers at once and now was trying to disentangle them. "Look, Mr Grover, I think I've found a way to save time."

The old printer didn't stop work. "Man and boy, I been foldin' papers forty-five years. I declare, there's only one way t' do it."

I started working myself. "Well, Mr Grover, maybe we'll have a folding machine someday."

"Yes, sir, I certainly hope you can put that thing over. I was just figurin' to m'self, maybe those political fellows will want to look at the shop. I was schemin' on gettin' things straightened up nice this afternoon."

"You're a grand old schemer, Mr Grover," I told him.

"It's just like I say, you treat me square and I'll treat you square. I'm always lookin' out for your interests."

It was the same old patter. I wondered briefly why I never tired of hearing the old printer utter the same few phrases over and over. In a way they

seemed like music, like humming machinery—the shop was working smoothly.

After a while the folding was done. Two thousand papers were ready to mail. Another week's work was finished.

Link and I went out into the pleasant sunshine in front of the shop, talking while we rested. "You know," he said, "we never did get time to paint that sign on the building. Suppose I get a ladder and do it this afternoon? How do you want it—'Jimson Andrews, Editor,' or 'Proprietor'?"

We looked at each other and grinned. Link, no matter what our differences, was a loyal spear carrier.

"No," I laughed, "we'd better wait till we're sure the place is ours. Anyway, you'll have to put your name up there, too, you know."

And now the sun was halfway down the long slide of the afternoon and a gentle haze lay over the unsheafed cornfields as Doris and I climbed the old rocky road that mounted the hill opposite the Logan place. It was the one road around Carterville which I had not explored. All day long, I knew, it had been in my mind to take this walk

with her, and now the paper was in the mail, the shop was spick-and-span—and I wanted to tell her of my hopes for the morrow. I wanted to see her face light up, and I thought it would.

But, toiling up the slope, she was silent. She seemed abstracted, though not aloof from me, as once she had been.

"Cheer up, we're getting there," I said.

She smiled at once. "I'm sorry. I meant to be gay—today." It was, I thought, a wistful smile, and it was quickly gone.

"Why today?" I asked.

"Because I won't be seeing you again."

"You mean you're going away?"

She was walking in the brown grass at the side of the road, watching where she put her feet. "Yes, for a while."

"But I'll see you when you come back," I said. "How long will you be gone?"

She didn't reply, and our shoes scraped on the rocks audibly. Suddenly she had come to the middle of the road and was walking beside me, but half a pace behind, so that I couldn't see her face. In low heels she came only to my shoulder. "You don't like me as I am, do you?"

"I don't like your being so withdrawn, if that's what you mean," I said. Something in her tone had made me reply thoughtfully. "I think I'd like the real you better."

"What if I told you I'd be different the next time you saw me?"

I dropped a pace to let her come abreast. I wanted to see her face. "What's going to change you?" I asked.

Her head jerked away in the old independent twist. "Nothing. Nothing can really change one, can it?"

"There's no use talking in riddles," I said. "If you told me what you're talking about, it would be different. How soon will you be back?"

"Very soon, I hope," she said. Stepping over a rock, she let her hand fall upon my arm. Then she looked up at my face, smiling. "No, let's not talk riddles today. Let's have a good time."

"Right you are," I said gladly, and I seized her hand and pulled her up the last steep rise of the hill. As we stood, getting our breath and looking back the way we had come, I saw that the hill was higher than I had thought. Beneath it the little town nestled compactly between the straight lines

of the highway and the railroad tracks. There was, too, a boxlike shack in a field, the print shop, and as we watched, a figure emerged—probably Link, who had been working on the account book when I left.

There is something about watching a scene like that with another person—a feeling of partnership is quick to spring up.

Doris' hand still lay on my arm as we continued looking down on the town, not at each other. "Do you know," I said after a moment, "I think I'm getting closer to that real you we were speaking of."

"Yes," she said quietly. "I tried to stop you. I don't want to any more."

Then we turned, and we both saw the house at once. We were standing on a little plateau, heavily overgrown with weeds and low brush. The house, a single-storied stone structure, stood only a few yards from us. It had a peaked alpine roof of slate. The two front windows were wide and deep set. It obviously was a new house, yet it blended into the surroundings as though it were camouflaged.

"The principal of the high school built it," Doris explained. "Father told me about it, but I

had never seen the place. It seems this man got married a couple of years ago, and he designed the cottage for his bride. She is supposed to have run away before he finished it, and he never lived in it. At least, I think that's the story."

I pushed on the door, but it was locked.

"Crawl in the window," Doris said.

When I had squirmed over the sill and opened the door for her, the sun streamed across a fine hardwood floor. "Welcome to our city," I said, and she entered, laughing softly.

Together we went through the four small rooms, all perfectly square, all the same size. In one of the front rooms there was an open fireplace, occupying most of the end wall. "The first thing to do," I said, "would be to tear out the partition and make one big room right across the front of the house. In a long room like that, with an open fireplace and two big windows, you'd have a regular hunting-lodge effect. You could put a couple of couches in the room and use them as beds when you had company. Why, you could make this into the nicest little place in the county. People from Nobles-town and from the University would come to see you. And you could have your books here. You

could build some low bookcases all around the walls."

"Yes." Standing in the doorway, facing out toward the valley, Doris spoke faintly. I watched the sunlight shining on her hair, and suddenly it seemed to be the most important thing in my life that I convince her I was not merely pipe dreaming. It seemed to me that she must have spoken so faintly, so unenthusiastically, because she thought I was building air castles.

"Listen, Doris, we might be able to get this place," I said. "It's not impossible, you know." And then I told her about the trip to Noblestown and the phone call from Mr Falconer and about my hope that the politicians would support the paper. Finally I told her that I didn't want to say any more until I returned from Richmond, that the future still was too uncertain to talk about ourselves.

I must have spoken for quite a while, for when I finished, the shadow of the house had grown long on the weeds around the door, and the sun was dropping behind the hill. While I talked, Doris hadn't changed her position, leaning in the doorway with her back toward me.

Now she was still silent. A little evening breeze picked up a fallen green leaf and blew it, skittering, across the floor.

I had to say something, "Ah, Doris——"

"Please!" Suddenly she sank down on the stone step just over the doorsill and put her face in her hands, sobbing.

I went over and stood behind her. I wanted to touch her, but I didn't think she would want that just then. I didn't know what I ought to do or say.

After a while she said, "Give me your handkerchief," and then she stopped crying and stood up. "Please don't look at me now," she said, fumbling with a compact.

I walked out to the edge of the plateau. In the town every window now was painted bright red by the sunset.

Finally I heard the door of the little house close, and Doris came and stood beside me. She spoke slowly, as though choosing her words: "I can't tell you everything yet, but I can tell you that the thing which holds me back doesn't have anything to do with you. I'm going to be way for about two weeks. After that I'll be able to explain all this to you. You may change your mind then." She

paused a moment, her gaze traveling out across the shadowed valley. "But, no matter what happens, I want you to know now that I think of you as the finest person in my life and that always, wherever you go, my prayer for your happiness will go with you."

There didn't seem to be anything else to say after that, and we started back to town, picking our way over the rocky road and catching at each other when we stumbled in the dusk.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WE MUST have been an odd group, waiting in front of the station that morning—old man Grover, Virgie, Link and I. Of course, they had come to see me off, and while we waited each of us spoke of the hopes he had of my trip to Richmond.

"Maybe," said old man Grover, "you'll be able to get a couple of fonts of type and some new column rules and a new ink roller for that old press. I declare, I like t' see a good paper, but a body can't do good work without the material."

"We'll throw away all that old junk and fix up a first-class shop," I told him. "And maybe we'll get a linotype machine. Virgie could learn to operate it. I've known of several women linotype operators."

I looked at Virgie, and she smiled in her wide, easily pleased way. "Oh, I'd like that, Mr Andrews."

Link said, "I'm going to make you buy that set

of account books so I can keep the records straight. And I think the business manager ought to have his own typewriter, too."

"Sure," I said, "and we'll get a new car for the editor." And, seeing them standing there so patiently, it did not seem to me that we were asking too much—merely the means of doing the work that we all loved.

Finally the train came puffing up the grade, a baggage car and two coaches, one for white and one for colored. As I swung up the steps and turned to those faithful three, waving and smiling and calling "Good luck," a warm flush went over me.

"Hold the fort," I yelled. My last glance fell on old man Grover, and it seemed to me that even his perpetually dour face was lit with hope.

The ancient wooden day coach with its cindery plush seats reminded me of traveling stock companies that got stranded in Kansas, and the valiant little railroad that hauled Stonewall Jackson's boys into the Valley of Virginia, and cardsharps who fleeced the unwary traveler under kerosene lamps.

But today the car was empty, except for the

brakeman, asleep with his feet on the seat opposite. I turned over a seat and took the same position. Outside, the brown countryside slipped by at a jogging pace. Presently I got out a pencil and began to work on a summary of the paper's needs. It was the same old refrain: new parts for the press, fifteen dollars; a batch of new leads and rules, ten dollars; some new fonts of type, ten dollars, and so on.

At Charlottesville the car filled up with boys from the University summer school, going to Richmond for the week end. I noticed their pressed linen suits, their genuine leather bags. They passed catchwords back and forth and laughed and drank corn whisky. . . . Well, I was like that once, so I didn't envy them.

In Richmond it seemed strange to be walking a city pavement again with a streetcar rumbling past—after the great silence of Carterville. Twice I narrowly escaped being run over, I was so unused to crossing traffic-filled streets. I had to laugh at myself.

But going up in the elevator to Falconer's office, I caught a glimpse of myself in a mirror and I

wasn't able to laugh. My eyes seemed to take up most of my face, it was so lean. Good Lord, I thought, this can't be you! Then, too, I had had to wear my old winter suit. The whole effect, I realized, was distinctly unprosperous and rather sickly.

The girl receptionist eyed me coldly. No, she was quite sure Mr Falconer was *not* in, but she would give my name to his secretary, since I insisted.

Finally I was ushered into a sunlit corner office commanding a view of the winding James River. A tall, square-shouldered man was standing before the window. He glanced at me quickly and said to the receptionist, "I thought Mr Andrews was waiting."

"I'm Andrews," I said as the girl started to explain.

"Oh." Falconer offered his hand. "I *am* sorry."

"That's perfectly all right," I laughed. "People have been mistaking me for a schoolboy for so long that I've gotten used to it. Sometimes, though, I've thought of growing a mustache."

"Yes, that might be a good idea." Falconer wasn't embarrassed. He took a seat behind a flat-

topped desk and indicated an upholstered chair for me. Then he waited.

"I've brought along some back issues of the paper, in case you'd like to see them," I said.

"No, thank you. As matter of fact, Mr Lord has sent me several copies." He spoke precisely, deliberately, feeling his way. "You know, I've always had a notion that some young man could publish a paper in that territory and do something with it—make it different from the usual dead weekly. But you've got to co-operate, son. You've got to work with the leaders in your community. You'll never get anywhere by yourself."

I nodded. "I've been trying to co-operate," I told him, diplomatically. "Unfortunately, my paper's handicapped. It hasn't the influence it might easily attain."

"How's that?" he asked.

It was my opening, and I hastened to paint a glowing picture of the paper Link and I might publish if only we didn't have to fight with our backs to the wall. Falconer listened attentively. But, as I spoke, I was conscious of the futility of trying during a brief interview to make him understand. I stopped abruptly.

He sat squarely in his chair, assured and somewhat detached. Suddenly I was bitterly conscious of the comparative meanness of my own affairs and of my ragged-edge appearance. He took a pen from its rack. "Have you made an estimate of how much you would need to buy your plant from Bixby and put in a linotype and the other equipment you speak of?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "Twenty-five hundred dollars at least. Three thousand to be on the safe side."

"That hardly seems enough. I understood it took at least eight thousand to buy a paper and put it in shape."

My hopes began to rise. "Ordinarily it would," I told him. "But I have a rather peculiar staff there in Carterville. I think we'd all be satisfied to take small salaries and put the profit back into the business for the first few years."

"I see." He tapped idly on the desk with the pen. Then he replaced it in the rack. "Well, I think you're doing a mighty fine job, Andrews, and I'm anxious to see you continue. As I said, it will pay you to co-operate."

He spoke in the tone one uses when, having refused a loan to a friend, one says, "But I certainly

hope you make out all right, old chap." So, then, I'd lost?

"Mr Falconer," I said, "I won't be able to continue unless I can get a loan to tide the paper over the next month or so."

He had swung around in his chair, evading my glance. "Of course, you understand it's out of the question for the party to take a hand in this," he said. "But it seems to me that you ought to be able to form a stock company among the local people."

I nearly laughed at that. "Those people in Carterville have the vote, and that's about all," I told him. "Why, do you know, I have had several letters from farmers' wives saying they enjoy the paper and hope I'll keep on sending it to them, but that they can't spare even one dollar for a year's subscription?"

Falconer made some sort of gesture with his shoulders. I wasn't sure, but it seemed to me that he had shrugged. Suddenly I was thinking of the schools in the county which had been open only five months last year and might not open at all this year, owing to an alleged budget deficiency. I felt guilty for having been so ready to throw my

lot with a political ring when I knew nothing about its activities. I felt myself getting an I-don't-care-to-hell-with-this-guy attitude, and I tried to fight it down, knowing this was my one and only opportunity.

But Falconer stood up and walked to the window and said, "If that's the way it is, then you had better look for a more profitable territory, hadn't you?"

And then I did spoil the opportunity. "I like that territory," I told him, "and I'm not immediately concerned about getting rich. I only hope I can continue to give the paper to those farmers' wives."

At that Falconer smiled and held out his hand, completely the politician, now that I was under no obligation to him. "It's been a pleasure to meet you, Mr Andrews, and I want to say that I admire your spirit. Drop in to see me the next time you're in town. Come in any time. Any time."

So that was that, I thought, waiting for the elevator. And now what could I tell old man Grover and Virgie and Link? That I had acted the prima donna and spoiled the chance they had worked so hard to give me?

Outside, the blazing afternoon had driven the crowds from the street. I took off my coat and vest and slung them over my shoulder. To hell with appearances now!

As I entered the Union Station, I saw some red-caps hurrying through a gate which was just closing. Above it a red-and-black sign read: WASHINGTON, PHILADELPHIA, NEW YORK. For one moment I had a wild notion to run through the gate and get aboard. It was one of those things one does mentally—I could see myself racing toward the gate. . . .

But sometime later, as the afternoon local toiled into the familiar towns, Charlottesville, Orange, Gordonsville, Culpeper, I became aware of a growing eagerness, and I began counting: now three more stations, now two more, now one more. And as the engineer blew for the Brandy crossing, I went out on the platform and watched for Fletcher's farm on top of the hill and Peter Doak's big barn with the Castoria sign painted on it, and I wondered if Doris might not return in less than two weeks.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

AFTER the train started on its way, the engine's drivers spinning a moment before they took hold, I stood watching the red taillights dwindling down the grade—going north. Cowbells tinkled. Charlie Roberts, in the field beside the tracks, was driving his father's two cows to evening milking. The usual crowd waited silently at the post office. Frank Embrey, the assistant postmaster, walked ahead of me with the mail sack over his shoulder. I felt I had been away a long time.

At the Boltons' the family was still at supper. "How'd you make out?" Link asked. They watched my face, Mr Bolton, Link, the three girls.

"I'm afraid I bungled it," I told them. "I don't know for sure."

Mrs Bolton came in with hot corn bread. "I just know everything will come out fine. You're just a little tired now."

Mr Bolton scraped his chair. "Excuse me, must be getting back to the store. We're open late to-night." The girls started clearing the table.

"Well?" Link took the chair beside me.

"I made a jackass of myself," I said. "I wish you had gone instead."

"Bunk! They wouldn't have sent for me. You've done a damn fine job here, Jimson, and if this thing falls through it's just tough luck, that's all. You did your best, so don't worry."

Good old Link. . . . I wanted to say something like that but, of course, I couldn't. "Aw, baloney," I said.

Peggy came in. "There's a colored man out back, Jimson. He wants to see you."

Link and I went through the kitchen to the back yard. The man was standing by the pump, outside the circle of light thrown from the kitchen door. He was an old skinny Negro, his kinky hair now white.

"What do you want?" I asked sharply.

"My old woman sent me up here. She say to tell you Miss Carney wants to see you."

"Miss Carney?"

"Yes, sir, that's right, sir." The Negro was back-

ing away on the other side of the pump. His voice had been low, the words mumbled quickly.

"Wait a minute, Sam, we'll go back with you," I said. I walked around the pump, Link following.

The Negro continued to retreat. "I ain't goin' back that-a-way. I ~~don't~~ know nothin' about this, I'll swear I don't." He stumbled over a pan of chicken feed and almost fell.

Suddenly my chest was tight, as though I were holding my breath and couldn't expel it. I cursed at him, "God damn it, you stay where you are till I'm finished talking to you. What the hell is this all about? Speak up and stop mumbling, if you know what's good for you."

"Yes, sir, I don't want no trouble with white folks. I'll swear I don't know nothin' about it, 'cept my old woman, she does the cookin' for Miss Carney, and this mornin' she went up there to the house and she didn't come back till just a little while ago and she says to me, 'Frank, that's a pow'ful sick little gal. Ain't she got no friends or kinfolks around here?' I says it ain't none o' my business no ways, but my old woman she says, 'Frank, you better go git somebody right quick.' So then I remembers seein' you a-walkin' down the

road with Miss Carney yesterday and I thinks, 'Maybe he'll be glad if old Frank tell him. Maybe he'll give old Frank a quarter.' "

"Link, give him a quarter," I heard myself say. I was running, stumbling across the yard, fumbling with the catch at the gate before I actually reached it. When I ran past the post office, the crowd stared. I had an impulse to shout at them, "For God's sake, mind your own business!" As I pushed at the Carneys' gate, Link caught up with me. He was breathing hard. It was a stifling night, and I could feel sweat on my own arms and in the palms of my hands.

There was a light in an upstairs room, where the blinds were drawn. There was a shadow, a bulky woman's shadow, on the blinds for a moment before it dwindled as she moved to another part of the room. At the porch Link said, "I'll wait here."

The hall was dark, but a vague light shone from the top of the stairs. As I started to mount, the light grew brighter, and when I turned at the landing, I saw a large Negro woman above me, holding a lamp. "Who's that?" she called sharply, and in the flickering light the whites of her eyes showed.

As I reached the top of the stairs, she backed

into the hall, barring the way. Beyond her another light shone through a half-open door. I started to push my way past her, and she thrust her shoulder into my chest. She was strong for such an old woman. "Get out of the way!" I said. I pushed her against the wall and went on down the hall.

The room was high-ceilinged and so big that the smoking lamp on a table in the center left shadows all around the edges. A china basin and an iron kettle stood on the table. Several clean towels were hung neatly over the back of a chair. The room had the appearance of having been put in order.

I stood beside the four-poster bed. Doris lay on her side beneath the sheet, her eyes closed. Her hair was startlingly bright against the absolute pallor of her cheek.

"Doris," I whispered, but she didn't stir. There was a harsh line in her face from nostril to mouth. The bones of her face stood out.

"She's asleep. You don't want to bother her now." The old Negress spoke in a sibilant whisper somewhere behind me. I hadn't known she was there.

I turned to her. I seemed to be hearing the words

long before I whispered them, "Asleep! How d' you know?"

She barely nodded, without speaking again. Somehow I got down the stairs. "Link, for God's sake, get Doc Cary!" I called.

Then there was nothing to do but wait. While I had raised the blinds to let the night air cool the room, the old Negress had watched me silently. Now, sitting in the rocking chair beside the table, she still watched.

"What's the matter with her?" I whispered. "Don't you know?"

Her silence, the twitching set of her wrinkled lips, seemed angry—or contemptuous. Finally she nodded. "You know . . ."

I went over to the foot of the bed again. The line of the body beneath the cover, the knees half drawn up, seemed pathetically frail. Just outside the window a bird or a cricket or a tree frog—I didn't know what it was—uttered a two-note sound over and over.

"When did she get sick?" I asked the Negress. I stood over her, wanting to slap her out of her silence.

"She come home late last night. Frank, he heard a auto stop by the gate. When I come this mornin' to clean, I found her lyin' in bed. . . . Poor little chile. Somebody got to pay for this." Again the woman regarded me with a cunning contempt. She rocked steadily. "Somebody got to pay."

"For what?" I said, but she merely continued to rock, the chair making a faint creaking on the faded carpet.

Finally I heard a car stop at the gate, and I went downstairs.

Doc Cary had been a ship's doctor. Two years ago he had quit the sea and sunk his savings to buy another doctor's practice in Carterville, sight unseen. Now he wished he hadn't. He was lanky and hard bitten, and he liked to tell smutty stories. Often he had stopped at the shop after supper to complain in a laughing, bitter way of the bills he couldn't collect, the old women who enjoyed being sick, the gossips, and his rival, old Doc Crawford. I was glad Link had been able to find him instead of Doc Crawford.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, stepping onto the porch. He hadn't greeted me with his usual

rough joke. He was quite serious, a little stern.

"I don't know," I told him. "Something seems to have happened to her last night. There's an old woman with her, but she won't tell me."

"All right, you stay here."

I started to follow him up the stairs, but he turned and said sharply, "Outside!"

I went back and sat with Link on the steps of the porch. He had a package of cigarettes, and I began smoking them. Presently there was a semicircle of butts in the grass, several of the coals still glowing faintly.

I stood up and walked out to the iron deer, looking up at the bedroom windows. The blinds were down again. I thought I could make out the doctor's shadow. It would grow larger, giant size, and then it would dwindle and disappear as he passed back and forth in front of the lamp. The moon had climbed to its zenith, changing from orange to yellow, to pale lemon. It must have been after midnight, I thought.

Link came out to the deer. "I wonder what's wrong with her. It couldn't be anything serious, coming on so unexpectedly." I knew he was trying to reassure me—that now, when he knew I was so

distraught, he had put aside any feeling of hostility toward her.

"I don't know," I told him. But by then I thought perhaps I did. There was the old Negress' contempt, old Frank's fear of becoming involved in the matter, Doris telling me she was going away, her withdrawal from her father and from me, her tears. "Hell," I said, "I don't know. She never told me anything."

"You like her a lot, don't you?" Link said, and I said, frankly, "Yes, more than that."

I started walking again, pacing round and round the deer, trying to think of all the hints she might have dropped. There was the book, *A Farewell to Arms*, which she had acted so strangely about. . . . I stopped next to Link, holding onto his arm. "You don't have to wait, fellow," I said. "Why don't you go on home?"

"No, I'd rather stay," he said quietly.

A long time later, it seemed, he said, "Isn't that Cary on the porch?"

I ran across the hummocky grass. "Well, what is it?" I said. "What's the trouble?"

He leaned against one of the pillars, lighting a cigarette. In the flare of the match his lean face

looked tired, a little grim. "Don't you really know?" He sounded impatient, half angry.

Then, of course, I knew. "Hell, Doc," I said, "you don't think I——"

"No, she told me."

"Well, how is she?" I asked him.

He didn't reply immediately. When he did, he spoke deliberately, as though analyzing the case to himself, "She went to some God damn quack over in the next county. He drove her home here and left her. That was late last night, twenty-four hours ago. She was all alone. She couldn't help herself much. She lost a lot of blood." His cigarette arched from the porch, a tiny spark for an instant before it was drowned in the long grass. "Damn! If that nigger wench had only called somebody this morning. But there you are. They think these things ought to be kept secret."

"But, Doc!" I cried. We had been talking in low tones, but now I heard my own voice crack out sharply. I made an effort to pitch it lower. "If it's blood she needs, why, Link and I . . . one of us ought to have the right blood count, or whatever it is."

"Peritonitis had set in," he said softly. Then he

moved quickly to the door, standing with his back to it, facing me. "If that nigger had only called someone sooner . . ."

I don't remember exactly what I did after that. I think I tried to get past Cary and go into the house. I kept telling him I wanted to see her.

But he was holding me by the arms, gripping them hard. "You don't want to do that," he kept saying. "She's not there any more, don't you understand? There's no one there to see!"

After a while we walked out to the car. Link and Cary were on either side of me, and when one of them touched my arm, I pulled away. I didn't want anyone touching me just then.

At the gate I looked back at the house. There was no light upstairs now, no light anywhere. In that hour before dawn the night had quieted. The crickets, the other things that lived in the grass were still. Beyond the trees the moonlight had paled out to a thin white sheet. The night seemed to have a pulse of its own, ticking and ticking. . . .

"All right, let's go," I said, getting into the car. As Cary started the motor, I told him of the only place I wanted to go—the shop. I remember notic-

ing the details of his new car, the fancy speedometer with its needle dial, the indirect lighting of the dashboard. Passing the Boltons', we heard a cock begin to crow in the back yard.

Link switched on the light in the shop and got out the Mason jar. Nobody said anything as we all drank, first Cary, then I, then Link. After a while we had another drink, all of us sitting on the edge of the desk, not looking at each other.

"It 'll be tough getting a death certificate," Cary said. "I'll have to fix up some kind of a story, I guess."

"Yes, you'll have to," I said. I was thinking of something else, but I didn't want to hear myself speaking the words. Finally I asked Cary if he knew of an undertaker who would give us credit. He said he would take care of that.

Then there was nothing more to say.

Cary slid off the desk, "Well . . ." He laid down a small blue envelope and went over to the door, speaking with his back to me, "She wouldn't let me call you. She said it would be better just to give you this."

CHAPTER TWENTY

AND then Sunday morning came on, bright and hot and very still. Link finally had gone down to the Boltons'. I was watching the sun blazing on the rank weeds in the field. Just before the sun rose, that field had been suffused with a vague blue light, and it had been quite beautiful. Now it was hideous. . . . Once more I tried to read the letter:

Friday evening.

Dear,

I have just come in from our long walk and I want to sit down now and write to you, in case anything happens. If everything turns out all right, you won't be reading this. But since I am writing, I might as well pretend that you are reading it.

First, I think you will understand well enough why I didn't tell you my trouble. Perhaps it would have been fairer if I had. At the beginning I was going to tell you, but as I got to know you, I saw

that you would take it on yourself to help me and that it would then become your trouble. And I felt that no one, not even you, should be involved in this but myself.

I wanted, when it was over, to tell you about it, as though it were just some accident that had happened to me, like cutting one's finger. For that was all it really was—a bad accident. Only, of course, I couldn't look at it quite so casually until it was all over, do you understand?

Well, and since you are reading this, it is over now, and so I can tell you that the incident was wholly without significance to me—without the significance even of the very first of our own meetings, if that means anything to you.

You may remember that night in the field, when you asked me if I loved this boy. I told you the truth, though I know you didn't believe me. I never loved anyone until you . . . But never mind. This is hard to say, and I must not let myself get off the subject.

It happened one night last spring, about a month before you came to Carterville. The spring had been late in coming, and this was one of the first nights when the air was warm and soft. He came

and asked me to go with him in his car and help him thrash out some problem about his marriage.

I think I told you that I had known him at the University and had tried to shield him against the others. He was so sensitive and, yes, weak. In a way you seem a little like him—in your reaching out to people so naïvely—but you are not really like him at all. You're not weak and, oh, I do hope you never will be. Never, never!

I suppose I was foolish to go with him that night. But he had come to me so often in the past that I felt a little like his mother or his older sister, and it seemed only natural that I should try to advise him.

We drove out to an old cabin, where we used to go before he was married, where we used to cook our supper and talk about books and the people we had met at the University. The cabin was on his father's farm, and in the old days we had fixed it up inside, and I suppose we used to sort of play house there. But we never thought of going farther than that—playing. So it never occurred to me that anything might happen, now that he was married.

But he started to tell me about his wife and, oh, it was such a pitiful story! I am afraid you won't

have much sympathy for the boy, but he had been horribly shocked. You see, this woman was so coarse that she had trampled his young idealism, hurting him worse than any possible physical wound. At least, that was the way he told it to me.

He seemed almost on the verge of insanity. He talked of killing this woman. Finally he told me that he thought things might be all right for him if he could know just once the love of another sensitive person. Just a single hour, he said, would enable him to go on with this woman. He said it would be something to cling to in the dark. . . .

But I must face myself truthfully! As you said that night, one has to live with one's self. And although I was sorry for him, surely I must have realized that he deserved his fate. So it must have been that I, too, was lonely and maybe a little flattered that he had come back to me. Then, too, it was such a night—the sort of night that makes you swell up inside so that you want to do something, anything for a release.

If you are reading this, it must be all for the best. Because having this operation wouldn't have changed me, would it? And I'd still have the same weakness in myself, and I couldn't have had you if

I was like that. No, you deserve someone far better. Only . . . well, I guess I don't like to think of that.

And now I must ask you to do one last favor. Father didn't need to go to the hospital just at this time, but I urged him to spend a month there, so that I would be able to get through with this thing. I suppose he will find out someday. But he hasn't many more years to live. Perhaps it could be kept from him. Can't you think of some story to tell him?

I have been crying a little as I write this. I'm sorry it's such a jumbled letter. . . . There's a car at the gate now. Probably the doctor who is going to help me. I must ask you not to try to learn his name or that of the boy. There wouldn't be any point in it, would there? Nothing to be gained—now.

Oh, my dear, when I think of the little house on the hill . . . our little house. But I mustn't go on. I haven't told you in all this how I feel about you, and now there isn't time. It would take many days to tell you fully, anyhow. . . .

Isn't it enough if I simply say that I loved you? I never said that to another—never!

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

WE BURIED her Monday morning.

Link and I waited at the shop for Cary to call for us in his car. Old man Grover and Virgie were throwing in type quietly. Link and I sat on the edge of the desk without speaking. It was another blazing day, a September day now. The pulse of the mill came to us faintly, "phut-phut phut-phut"—life was going on.

Finally the old printer spoke: "Mr Andrews, course it's none o' my business, but Virgie and myself were wonderin' how you come out down there at Richmond?"

I looked at him a moment before the question registered. "I'm sorry, I thought I'd told you," I said. "I'm afraid we'll have to struggle along under our own power awhile longer."

He returned to his work. The "click-click" of falling type was resumed. Then he said, "I was just sayin' to myself this morning, 'Maybe it 'd be best

if that thing didn't go through.' We don't want no outsiders comin' in here and tellin' us what to do, and that's what would happen, sure as you're born."

I heard myself reply in the same old mechanical patter, "That's right, Mr Grover. That's the truth." Vaguely I realized that one more hope had been blasted for the old man and that he had taken it as I might have expected him to—philosophically.

Cary drove up, and Link and I went out to the car. The doctor was angry. "D' you know, that chicken-livered Beevan told me he wouldn't read the service. 'She's beyond my help,' he says, 'she'll have to answer to her Maker alone.' The damn scoundrel must have been listening to a bunch of old women. They've been talking all summer about that girl. I know which one of 'em started it, too, and I'd like to slap her right across her dirty mouth."

I was surprised that Cary had gone for the minister. He seemed to think it was necessary. If the minister had offered his services, I think I would have refused them. Somehow I didn't think Doris would want anything like that. But after Cary had spoken, I wondered if perhaps I was wrong.

We were passing the Boltons', and I asked Cary to stop the car. There was a book of Swinburne's poems, the only book I had brought to Carterville, lying on my dresser. When I came out of the house, I tried to hide the title against my coat. I knew there wasn't anything very appropriate in the book, and I wished I'd had another poet—Tennyson, say.

"Now we've all got to stick to the same story," Cary cautioned. "I made it a cerebral thrombosis on the death certificate, induced by sun exposure. If a thing like this gets around in a small town, there's liable to be trouble."

"Yeah, they might want to lynch us," Link said, a little melodramatically.

I told him they were welcome to try.

A black auto-hearse waited near the iron deer. I tried not to see it. Link and Cary had been here Sunday with the undertaker, I knew. Now a young pleasant-faced man in a gray suit came to meet us. Cary introduced him, a Mr Gordon from Nobles-town.

When I shook hands with him I said an odd thing, I don't know why: "You're the nicest-looking undertaker I could imagine."

He looked blank. Cary and Link didn't smile, either. "Hell," I said, "what is this, a funeral?"

Link took hold of my arm. "All right, take it easy, fellow," he said.

At once I was ashamed of my antics. "I'm sorry, gentlemen," I said. But that sounded even worse; that "gentlemen" sounded as though I were ridiculing the procedure. I began to wish I'd taken a drink before we started.

We all stood silent, shifting and waiting for someone to start toward the house. I wanted to put that off. "That's a nice-looking hearse you have there," I said, but the undertaker didn't say anything.

"Well . . ." Cary touched the undertaker's arm.

"I have everything ready any time you are," the man said. He and Cary started toward the house. Link still had me by the arm, pushing. At the porch I pulled away from him. I knew what I wanted to say, and the only thing to do was to say it: "Mr Gordon, have you closed the coffin yet?"

"No, sir, I thought perhaps . . ."

"If it wouldn't hurt your feelings," I said, "I'd rather not view your professional handiwork."

"I understand perfectly."

"Thank you," I said. "Thank you very much. You really are the nicest undertaker imaginable."

Then Link and I sat down on the porch steps to wait. "We saw that nigger wench and her husband last night," he said. "Cary threw the fear of God into them. I don't think they'll talk."

In the house there was a faint tapping, then a squeak—the undertaker was driving his screws. I picked up some pebbles and started tossing them at the deer. I couldn't come within a yard of it. Finally Cary came out and said, "O.K., let's go."

The coffin lay upon two chairs in the hall. It was white, a child's coffin, and I remembered asking Cary to get that kind. Each of us took hold of a brass handle. "Ready?" the undertaker said.

Suddenly I was thinking of vaudeville acrobats and how they said "Ready . . . right" before executing some simple trick.

"Alley—oop!" I cried.

We followed the hearse in the doctor's car. At the station four or five youths gaped. From the door of his office Mayor Bixby watched. Further on, a woman stopped on the sidewalk and gazed as we passed—one hearse and a cortege of one pleasure car.

"Go on, stare, you idiots, stare!" Cary said softly, and it took me a moment to realize what he was talking about. I had almost forgotten about the town by now.

The cemetery lay upon a gentle slope, out of sight of the town. It was merely an open field, littered with small headstones, most of them reclining at an abrupt angle or flattened to the ground. Near the top of the field the hearse had halted beside a mound of earth. Two Negroes stood a little way off, leaning on their shovels.

The young undertaker took off his coat and laid it carefully over the door of his car. Link and Cary and I took off our coats. We all were sweating.

When we got the coffin over the hole, we found we couldn't lower it far enough. There were about two feet more below the box, although we were kneeling on the earth. "All right, drop it," I said. It fell with only a gentle thump and lay quite evenly.

I remember watching the young undertaker take out a white handkerchief and carefully dust off his creased trousers. No doubt, his father had been in the business, and perhaps even his grandfather, I thought.

I went back to the car and started putting on my coat, trying to bring myself to tell the grave-diggers simply to toss in the earth, foregoing any ceremony. I knew that was the logical thing to do. I knew she was gone and that no amount of talking could make any difference. I believed that implicitly.

"Shall I tell them to go ahead?" Link said. He stood on the other side of the car, putting on his own coat and watching me closely.

"What do you think?" I asked him.

"I don't know. It seems sort of unfinished."

I picked up the book of Swinburne's and started turning the pages. I had to rub my eyes before I could read the print. It wasn't that I was crying, but my vision was out of focus for the moment—as though I had been staring too long at a light. Finally I went back to the grave. Link and Cary and the undertaker stood on one side of the hole, watching me. I stood on the other.

*"Here, where the world is quiet,
Here, where all trouble seems
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
In doubtful dreams of dreams,*

*I watch the green field growing
For reaping folk and sowing,
For harvest-time and mowing,
A sleepy world of streams."*

I stopped at the end of the stanza, still hearing my own voice crashing against the hot, silent morning. Somehow that wasn't it. I turned the page.

*"From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be,
That no life lives forever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea."*

At lunch the family was silent. As always, we had to wait for Mr Bolton to say grace aloud, "Oh, Lord, we thank Thee for these and all Thy bles-sings; forgive us our sins and save us . . ." He pronounced "blessings" as though it were two words. Then he proceeded to eat, his eyes steadfastly on his plate. The girls watched their own

plates. Link and I watched ours. Finally Mrs Bolton, standing by the sideboard and nervously clasping her hands before her, said, "I guess you all don't like funerals much, do you?"

"No," Link said.

"Well, I think it's just a shame about that poor girl. She used to come to the store sometimes. I always thought she had the nicest ways about her."

So the town knew already, I thought. Now it waited to hear from Link and me. "We didn't know her very well," I said, "but it seemed as though *somebody* ought to go to the funeral." I didn't know whether or not the lie sounded convincing and I didn't care.

Kay was watching me across the table. "We knew her in high school," she said. "She was a sweet girl." I remembered something Kay had said one night when the girls were helping us fold papers: "We think of you just like a big brother." I wondered.

At the shop Virgie was reading the funny papers from Washington. Old man Grover was puttering about aimlessly. Everything was in perfect order, all the type thrown into the boxes. It was the first

time I had seen the shop completely idle during the day, Sundays included.

"Mr Andrews, you got some articles or somethin' that you want Virgie and me to start settin' up?" Grover peered from the back room, pathetically eager to continue with the only thing he lived for—work.

I lifted the cover off the portable typewriter, a phrase or two forming in my mind. "I'll give you something to set!" I said. But even as I wrote, I knew the obituary could not appear:

Without benefit of clergy, Doris Carney, nineteen, unwed, who evaluated an emotional integrity above the physical life, started on a new adventure today. . . .

I studied the paragraph for a moment, getting an odd satisfaction out of the phrase "without benefit of clergy." Then I crumpled up the copy, touched a match to it and dropped it on the cement floor. Link had been watching me. "Do you want me to try my hand?" he asked.

"No," I told him, "we'll have to skip it." I hunted through the drawers of the desk until I

found a sheet of ready-made fillers which the previous editor had used. So far I hadn't used one, which was one of my secret prides. Now Grover and Virgie were to set them:

No man protects his property by standing idle while robbers take what his neighbors have.

And another:

The barometer of the condition of a community is the percentage of its delinquent taxes.

"Got any money?" Link asked. "I think I'll go down the road and get another jar of white lightning."

I gave him a dollar and a half, the price of a half-gallon. Then I put a fresh sheet in the machine and began a letter to Doris' father. I tried to keep it as simple as possible, merely telling the old gentleman his daughter had died of a sunstroke. Finally it was done and I took it down to the post office.

Frank Embrey looked at me curiously through the wicket as I bought a stamp. "Too bad about that girl. I used to see her when she came for the

mail, and I said to myself, 'That girl don't look well.' "

"Yes," I said.

I went out into the street and tried to decide what to do next. At the railroad siding two Negroes were pitching grain sacks from a flat-bed wagon into a boxcar. They would pitch two or three sacks and stop, and one of them would say something, and then they'd both laugh, hooting and pushing at each other. A freight whistled up the line, and in a moment it pounded past. A tramp, his clothes flapping in the wind, clung to the end of a tank car.

Suddenly I knew what I wanted to do. When I came to the cemetery the afternoon had grown old, and all the inclining headstones cast irregular shadows on the field. A sagging wooden fence surrounded the acre, and beyond it, in the next field, three cows munched the short grass, their bells clanking intermittently.

I found the patch of raw earth. I stood near it, watching the cows and listening to the almost inaudible hum of the bees and the other things of the field. Near the fence there was a spot of color where some blue cornflowers and a rank yellow

bloom of some kind or other grew wild. I thought of picking a few and placing them on the grave. But they would last longer where they stood, I decided.

Finally the long, hot day drew to its close. The shadows of the stones lengthened and blended into the bluish dusk, which was not unlike the dawn that I had seen come over the fields that morning. A boy and a barking dog came to get in the cows. Over the hill a church bell rang out in the town—calling the folk to Monday-evening prayer meeting, I supposed. Already one star showed. . . .

I started back to town, telling myself that I didn't feel as bad now as before.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WE GOT out another paper. It had only four pages, instead of the usual eight, and we had used a full-page house ad to help fill it up. It came out on Saturday, two days late.

Now, in the evening, we were still in the shop, drinking from the Mason jar. Link's voice when he spoke was brittle, not babbling, so I knew he wasn't tight yet: "It's funny, it's not hitting me."

"It is me," I said. I didn't know exactly when it had happened, but sometime during the last few days I had stopped worrying about the paper. . . . Perhaps the Einstein theory might explain it, I thought: one's idea of the relative importance of an undertaking slipped, and one had to start all over getting one's bearings.

Doc Cary came in. He was talking about a dance at Orange, some twenty miles away. "Dance?" Link said, and Cary said, "Sure, you know, something you do with your feet." Cary, I perceived,

had decided it would do us good to get away from the shop. Link evidently thought I wouldn't want to go. I watched them arguing over it and felt oddly as though I were a stranger, peeping at something I wasn't supposed to see. I didn't feel present physically. I took another drink.

"What is there to argue about?" I said. "If Cary wants to go, let's go. What difference does it make?"

At the Boltons', Kay was sitting in the porch swing. When I asked her to come with us, she jumped up at once. "Oh, I'd love to, but I don't know if Father will let me," she said. Presently she reappeared, wearing a white evening dress. Her hair was drawn away from her forehead.

"You look altogether different," I told her, hearing my own voice with that same feeling of being outside myself, watching all that I did. In the car, I put my arm across the back of the seat, barely touching her shoulders. I was glad she was there. Perhaps some people never know the feeling, but at times the touch of a living animal—a dog, for instance, and particularly a woman—becomes a necessity. It keeps one from jumping out of one's skin.

I was holding the Mason jar in my free hand. I handed it to Kay and asked her to screw the top on. She must have known what I wanted, for she set the jar on the floor and came back where I could kiss her. After a while I drew away a little and tried to be nice to her, smoothing her hair, and so on. But the gesture was meaningless. I was watching myself going through certain motions which I seemed powerless to avoid. I hadn't, I thought suddenly, ever kissed Doris.

I sat up straight and tried to tell Kay what was the trouble: "I have a terrible sense of unreality. Maybe it's because I've been drinking, but I don't think so. I don't seem to care about any of the things which seemed important a week ago. That's why I kissed you. I wanted to see if that wouldn't be real. But it wasn't. I'm sorry."

Kay was holding onto my hand, and in the faint whiteness of the night I could see she was watching my face. But she wasn't going to reply. For a moment I wondered if I had spoken, or merely had phrased the words in my own mind. "Don't you see?" I said.

"You're just tired, that's all. You should try and relax."

"Yes," I said. "I suppose you're right. It sounds good, anyway. I certainly hope you *are* right."

The car mounted a hill and slowed a little coming into Culpeper. First there were the old brick houses with the trees standing in no formal order between them and the street. There was the flash of white fence palings. Then there was the deserted business block, Crosson's department store with its polished brass doorknobs, "1850" over the entrance in bronze figures; the office of the *Virginia Star*, secure behind dull brown shutters, and across the street the disrespectful, chipped-off brick of the Culpeper *Exponent's* plant (three editors were shot there, they say); and down by the tracks the cupolaed town hall and post office combined and the long station with one green-shaded light still burning over the agent's telegraph key, the only light in town. Coming upon the place as it slept, one almost could see the thin ranks of gray, the forage caps, the spent cavalry filing silently through the street at dawn, Manassas and the Wilderness ahead. . . . If Carterville only were like this, I thought.

I took my hand from Kay's, pretending that I needed it to unscrew the cap of the jar. I didn't

want another drink, though. "I'm awfully sorry about what happened back there," I said. "It didn't mean anything, you know."

"That's all right." She was staring out the window, and I couldn't tell how she felt about it.

Cary parked the car in the picnic grove beside the pavilion. It was a two-story frame structure, with the lower floor open at the sides, so that the second floor looked as though it stood on stilts. A soda fountain and some round tables occupied the first floor. A narrow flight of wooden stairs led up the outside of the building to the dance floor. Admission was fifty cents, ladies free.

Cary and Link helped Kay out of the car and stood by the door, waiting for me. I told them to go on without me, but Kay said, "No, you've got to come. I won't go in unless you do."

So we went on up the stairs and joined the sons and daughters of storekeepers, undertakers, doctors, garage men and the better-to-do farmers jogging and bumping and pushing about the floor. Some orange paper festoons hung in the rafters, stirring slightly with the motion of the dancers. The orchestra, which called itself the Cavaliers, sat

behind a row of wooden plaques, each of which offered a red-and-black sketch of a knight on horseback with lance upraised. The orchestra had come from the University, and it looked bored. It played "Somebody Stole My Gal" and "Dinah," and the music was mostly a blur of noise until the pianist got a solo break. He pounded down around the end of the keyboard, bringing the song into focus:

*The very thought of you,
The very days we knew . . .*

It was sharp, and suddenly I was thinking of a tea dance at the Biltmore, with the late afternoon sun, winter sun, streaming through the tall windows in a gentle golden haze, and white napery and cocktails and fresh-looking people in fresh clothes, and not too many of them on the floor—and Doris. Somehow it seemed to me that I had been there with her. . . .

"Break, please."

I said, "What?" and then I handed Kay over to Charlie Bronson, a freckle-faced youth from Carterville who sometimes called at the Boltons'. I started shifting through the throng aimlessly. After

I had been around the room once, wondering what I was trying to do, I remembered I was looking for Link. Then he took hold of my arm.

We went outside and sat on a bench under a tree that seemed bending beneath its foliage, it was so full. Link fumbled under the bench for the Mason jar. I could hear him swallowing before he handed the jar to me.

"Wish I could feel the stuff," he said.

"Why can't you?"

"I don't know. I feel it in the legs a little, that's all."

I tilted the jar, and the raw corn almost came back up. I knew I had had too much then. I held the jar in my hands, hearing the music a long way off:

*The very thought of you,
The very days we knew . . .*

"Hell," I said, "what is the matter with me?"

"What d' you mean?"

"I can't get organized," I said. "I keep feeling that I'm going through motions. There's nothing I want to do, but I can't remain still. I didn't want to kiss Kay. It never entered my head before, and suddenly there I was doing it."

"You've had a shock," Link said softly.

"Even so," I said, "I ought to be able to get organized. It seems more like a culmination of things. I'm getting sick of myself."

"I know, you're getting like me," he said. "You want to do something, but you don't know where to begin. You were all right while you were excited about the paper. Now you're worse off than I, because I'm used to being muddled. You're not."

The orchestra had stopped for intermission, and the park was beginning to fill with young couples, talking, almost whispering to each other against the pressing night.

"Bunch of kids," I said, trying to change the subject.

"What?"

"Nothing," I said.

Cary came over to us. He took the jar and sipped from it. "Phew! I'm going to get a chaser." As we went toward the pavilion, I stumbled against his arm. "You'd better take it easy," he said.

I was looking for Kay in the crowd around the soda fountain. "There she is," Cary said, "talking to Norman Avery and his wife."

She was standing at the edge of the crowd with

a tall, fair-haired boy and a woman. The woman kept her eyes on the boy's face. He seemed to be looking over her head, evading her glance. The woman was fairly built in a set, matured mold, but she was not good to look at. There was not in her face nor in her body a single yielding line. . . . "Norman did right well for himself," Cary was saying. "His wife 'll have a pot of money in a few years."

I had started away from the fountain, but now I halted. Something seemed to focus sharply, so that all the faces between me and the tall boy and the woman faded out of the room. "Are they from Carterville?" I asked Cary.

"Yes, they only got married last spring," he said.

"The boy went to the University, didn't he?"

"Yes."

I walked through the crowd. I bumped into a table, said "Pardon me" and went around it. When I stood beside Kay, I didn't know what I was going to do next. I didn't know whether I wanted to do anything. I touched her on the arm and waited.

"Mr and Mrs Avery, this is Mr Andrews, the editor of the paper, you know." After Kay had spoken, the boy started to smile and held out his

hand. But there must have been something in my face, for he put his hand in his pocket quickly, embarrassed. His mouth, I noticed, was heavy and only partly closed. Now he looked at the woman.

She began to laugh, a sharp, mocking note. "Kay, I think your boy friend is a little under the weather," she said. She went on laughing, "Really, you ought to keep him on a leash when he looks so fierce. I think he's frightening poor Norman to death."

Then the boy tried to laugh, too. "Oh, that's good! Sure, I'm scared to death." His voice stopped abruptly.

The woman had taken his arm and edged in front of him. I was watching her face now, not his. Her eyes were translucent, almost without pupils. I watched her mouth opening to speak again, and I also watched myself from a little distance. "We must excuse Mr Andrews," she said. "It's a shame about that poor Carney girl, isn't it? We all know how Mr Andrews must have felt about her."

"Anna, shut up!" The boy had spoken, but the woman continued, her voice rising: "And why shouldn't we talk about it? Why, I think it's a shame that of all the people in Carterville, it had to

be two perfect strangers that went to her funeral! But I suppose you *had* to go to get the news for your paper, didn't you, Mr Andrews?"

"Anna, please!" the boy said. His head was turned away, and he was jerking at her arm.

Watching it all from outside myself as I was, I heard Kay, somewhere behind me, speaking quickly to Link and Cary. And I heard myself saying something to the woman a moment before I said it:

"Bitch!"

"Norman," she cried, "are you going to let him say that?"

"No," he said, hysterically, "no, he can't get away with that." But he made no move towards me. He seemed, rather, to be trying to escape the sound of her voice.

"What's the matter, Jimson?" Link said at my elbow.

I still hadn't made a move, and there seemed none to make. I couldn't strike the woman, and I didn't care whether I hit the boy or not. I remember that I finally said something like, "Oh, what's the use?" and turned away.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

MALCOLM LORD tapped a riding crop against his boot. I had found him in midmorning at the stables. Now he smiled slowly. "When are you leaving?" he asked.

"In about two weeks," I told him. "As soon as my next payment to Bixby falls due."

The politician watched a Negro boy leading a horse around the yard, cooling it after the ride. "I'm sorry," he said. "You must come into the house and have a julep before you start back."

The big front room, with its french doors open onto the lawn, was filled with sun, yet it was cool. A maid was dusting the shiny piano and the other richly glistening furniture. "Mary, will you tell Harry to fix two juleps right away, please," the politician said. He seated himself on the piano stool, his back to the instrument. I sank into one of the heavily upholstered chairs, envying once again the luxury and the permanence of the place. I

wished I could go on sitting there, waiting for a mint julep. I wished there were some way to arrest the moment.

"So you can't hold out any longer?" Malcolm Lord said finally. He let his elbow fall upon the keys, sending a clear tinkle through the house. The house was very quiet. A little breeze came through the open doors, relieving the heat. "Mr Andrews, I wish, for personal reasons, that you could keep on with your paper. I've been thinking . . . perhaps I could lend you enough to continue for another month or so. Then we could see what happens."

I thought for a moment, wondering why I didn't respond, wondering once more what was the matter with me. Finally I tried to explain that my perspective had changed, that I was no longer interested in the paper to the extent I had been. "I guess I overdramatized the business to start with," I said. "Now I'm getting the reaction."

"I see." The politician sounded disappointed.

I stood up and started walking around the room. There was something about this man which made it easy for me to talk to him. He didn't seem to mind listening. "Of course, I'm not going to give up till the last card is played," I told him. "But you

can see why, feeling as I now do, I can't accept a loan. I wouldn't be taking it in good faith, would I?"

He didn't reply, and after a moment I sat down and tried to explain further: "I have been telling myself that this is only what every man experiences in the struggle with a new venture. Yet what disturbs me is that it is a change which has taken place in me so often before—with every venture I've ever undertaken, with every new job. At the outset I'm enthusiastic, then I lose interest. The other night I sat by the open window in my shop, watching the heat lightning flashing against the clouds, and that made me think of all the other men who were making plans all over the world. I thought, too, of the men who planned in ages gone by, and of the men still unborn who may conceive the biggest plans of all. These thoughts, for some reason, depress me——"

I stopped talking abruptly as the maid entered the room with the juleps. I was embarrassed. When, I wondered, was I going to learn to practice a little reserve with people?

"Son, I envy you," Malcolm Lord said.

"Why, sir?" I asked, genuinely surprised.

"Because you will never come to the end of the road. You can't see it at the moment, but as soon as you leave your paper, another objective will loom up. Therefore, you will never be bored."

"But that's rainbow-chasing, isn't it?" I objected. "That's exactly what I had hoped to get away from."

The politician considered the point. "Of course, you have to guard against moving too quickly. . . . But, no, I don't call it rainbow-chasing when you tackle a problem and master it and then go on to a new one. That is more like progress, if you are a young man."

I felt myself beginning to smile. This was encouraging, and yet . . . "But apparently I didn't master this problem," I said quickly. "I failed."

"Did you?" The politician chuckled softly. "Are you sure about that?"

Then we were both laughing over our glasses as we stood in the doorway in the warm morning sun. We were laughing together about something, and I wasn't even sure of what it was.

Sometime later when I took my leave, Malcolm Lord said, "You will try again."

"Why, yes," I said, "I guess I'll have to." And as

I went toward the highway to hail a ride back to Carterville, I was glad I had come to see him before going away.

When I got back to the shop, I found Link sitting with his feet on the desk, reading the help-wanted ads in the *New York Times*.

"Find anything?" I said, laughing.

"Yeah," he said, "if you're an experienced butcher, or a barber, or a sheet welder, or a licensed accountant."

"How about salesmen?" I said. "They always want plenty of those to work on commission, don't they?"

He started to grin. "We're fine salesmen, we are. We couldn't sell solid-gold bricks." Then we both laughed, thinking of what a hard time we would have getting jobs, but not wanting to admit it.

"Have you told *them* yet?" Link asked, jerking his head toward the back room.

"No, maybe I ought to," I said, going toward the door. . . . Then I saw Virgie. She was standing near the press, with her back to me. Her shoulders were bent, and she had her face in her hands. She was crying. Old man Grover was standing beside

her, patting her on the shoulder and sidling about ineffectually. When he saw me, he started to curse. It was the first time I had heard him use profanity:

"I only hope the good Lord can look down from Up Yonder and see the black-hearted devils that live in this place. I declare, He ought to tell 'em to turn around and go straight down to hell when they come up to the Gates."

"What's the matter?" I asked. But I knew what it was before he had told me.

"I sent Virgie down to get the mail," the old printer explained. "She run into some of them gossipin' old women. I been tellin' her not to pay no heed to 'em, but now they've gone and got her all upset." He picked up a heavy iron ladle which we used for handling the stereotype metal. "I got a good mind to go downtown and clean up the whole bunch of 'em!"

I was surprised that I wasn't angry, too. Since the night that Doris had died, nothing seemed to stir me as it used to. "Yes, and I'd like to go with you," I told him, without conviction.

"No, you mustn't do anything," Virgie interrupted anxiously. "I'm going away. Then everything will be all right."

"No!" old man Grover yelled. "By God, if I'll let 'em drive a daughter of mine out of this town!" He brandished the iron ladle in a pathetic gesture, nearly losing his balance.

Link came running in, laughing. "That's right, Mr Grover. Let's show this town something," he said.

"No, Poppa, no!" Virgie cried.

Once again I seemed to be watching the whole scene from a distance. A few weeks ago I would have been caught up in an hysterical loyalty toward this faithful group that had weathered the long summer together. Now I felt older, tired, perhaps even wiser than they. "Tell me, Virgie," I said, touching her arm.

"Oh, please don't let them do anything," she begged. "It would only make more trouble for Harry Mason. They're talking about firing him. But if I go away, I think they'll forget about it."

"See!" the old printer continued to yell. "The black-hearted devils ought t' be sent to the penitentiary!"

Link by now was laughing almost hysterically and egging the old man on: "Come on, Mr Grover, we'll show 'em. Forward, the Light Brigade!"

I turned on him, disgusted: "Link, for God's sake, shut up and take Mr Grover in the other room."

He sobered at once. I knew he was hysterical partly because he would be leaving on the evening train. He hadn't indulged in horseplay since a week or so after his arrival, and now this merely was the reaction of feeling responsibility slipping from him.

When he had drawn the old printer into the front room, I began to question Virgie. Seeing her standing there so distraught, I felt almost physically sick. I would have gone out to do battle with the town gladly if I had thought it would help her. But I knew the story even as she told it to me—the churchwomen and the preacher had been to Mayor Bixby and asked that the policeman be discharged. . . . "So I think it will be best if I go back to Richmond," Virgie said. "My aunt will look out for me and the children, and maybe I can find a job in a printing office there."

"You know how I hate to see you go," I said, feeling, as usual, the inadequacy of words.

"Yes, I hate to leave you all." She was standing with her face averted, looking out the back door

to the field which shimmered with dust under the afternoon sun. In the front room I could hear old man Grover beginning a long, complaining discourse, and I knew he would rest content with that.

After a while Virgie spoke again, "Anyway, it's been a fine summer, Mr Andrews—the finest I ever spent."

I couldn't say anything. But as she turned, I made her give me her hand, and I did what might seem a mawkish thing. I kissed one of her square, workworn fingers and told her to be careful not to rub them raw for her next boss.

After supper we went to Link's room while he collected his few belongings. We moved about silently, avoiding each other's eyes. He was so slow about the packing that I was afraid he would miss the train. Finally I started to help him stuff his clothes into the zipper bag which he had arrived with. Then he stopped altogether and sat on the bed, watching me. "Jimson, couldn't I get the morning train instead?"

"Why?" I said. But I knew the reason. I went to the window, watching a green block signal near

the station. Its edges glistened in points, like a star.

"I know I haven't been much help to you. But somehow I've got a feeling about the paper, too, you know. I'd sort of like to stick by the sinking ship."

He made me think of a small boy—asking if he couldn't take the morning train when he meant to say he didn't want to go at all. When I finally told him the only thing I could, I had to be brusque: "To be frank, Link, I won't be able to meet your board bill after today."

"I understand," he said after a moment. "Bosco can't carry double any longer, eh?" He finished packing quickly. "O.K., let's go."

Walking to the station, I kept trying to explain, though I had thought he understood: "You see, Link, I've only got seven dollars left. And I don't want to leave town owing any money."

"That's all right. I'm sorry I said anything."

In the darkness I couldn't see his expression. But I thought his jaw might be set, judging from his voice. We passed the crowd at the post office, and our feet crunched the gravel beside the tracks. Frank Embrey was there already, waiting for the mail. He and two or three small boys were throw-

ing rocks at the black funnel of the water tower. "Betcha I can hit it 'fore you do," one of the boys cried, and they all started throwing as fast as they could, their figures bending and swaying in the darkness, until one missile found its mark with a resonant clang.

As the train blew for the Brandy crossing, I handed Link the advertising scrip book which the Southern issued to editors. It would take him to Washington. From there he'd have to hitchhike.

When he saw the book he tried to give it back to me, saying he had enough money for his fare. We argued hotly as the train whistled again, this time for Carterville. When I caught a glimpse of his face in the headlight's beam, I saw that he wasn't angry—merely upset. "Take it, take it!" I yelled. "Do you want to make me mad?"

We shook hands, and he got onto the step of the coach. He said something which the engine's bell drowned out.

"What?" I said as the train started to move.

"I said, we'll make a go of it next time!" he cried, and I yelled, "Sure, we'll be sitting on top of the world."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

AND then overnight, it seemed, fall was upon us. I woke up and reached for the blanket at the foot of the bed. In the morning old man Grover would burn trash in the round iron stove to combat the chill, the day would come on hot as ever, and in the evening we would close the windows and build up the fire again.

Those last two weeks in Carterville were the pleasantest, for I had a sense of an inevitable fate working and was ready to submit to it. Each evening I would walk along the creek until I came to the site of the old water mill which had burned ten years ago. There remained a cement platform at the edge of the rapids, a fragment of the dam, and here I would sit, watching the sunset burn on the rushing water, then fade to pastel tints and finally give way to darkness and sharp sound—the sound of water claimed the night.

Grover and I were alone for long hours in the

shop. I didn't go out to sell ads, and the old man and I seemed to draw closer than ever within our little fortress.

We laughed a good deal at things which probably would not have seemed humorous to anyone else. Grover told me stories of his younger days, when he caroused all night but was the first on the job in the morning, by gum—the days of his prime when he stood in a line with thirty other printers hand-setting columns of type for the old Richmond *Despatch*.

"But they brought in the machines," he said, and his hand dropped to a case of type and he picked up a letter and let it fall, a gesture that somehow made me proud of having known him and been his confidant.

He told me of working for a paper in Gordonsville, where, as in our case, few of the subscribers had paid. Grover inserted an appeal in the paper, and the next day had to stand in the shop from dawn until dusk while five hundred farmers or their wives formed a line and filed past to give him their dollar bills. "When I got home that night, my pockets were just a-bulgin' out with money, I don't know how much 'twas," he told me.

I asked him why we couldn't make a similar appeal, and for a moment my enthusiasm flared anew as I envisioned the two thousand dollars which we might collect. But he said no, that had been a long time ago, folks were different nowadays. That was the gist of most of his conversation. "It just 'pears to me like people are out to get what they can. They all want to get somethin' for nothin'."

The old printer's rheumatism forecast the winter to come. Some days he fairly staggered into the shop. I kept urging him to stay home, but he invariably replied that he'd only be more miserable lying in his bed. One day I asked him seriously if he ever expected to leave Carterville, and he looked up from the box where he sat crouched over his stick. "Course I'd like to get away from this awful place," he said, "but it just looks to me like there's no place else for an old fellow. Them city shops got no use for an old hand-set printer. They'll be callin' me Up Yonder soon, anyhow."

"Oh no, Mr Grover," I declared. "Why, you'll probably outlive me."

At that he merely chuckled: "Never mind, I'm ready any time they call me."

Yet old man Grover had far from given up, as he demonstrated when I had to call on him for help just one more time.

The Noblestown paper, replying to the editorial I had written at Malcolm Lord's behest, blasted me in a front-page editorial captioned "A Pain in the Neck," and once more the old printer and I worked at the fever pitch of the summer. The editorial had referred to me as the "fictitious editor" and had gone on to point out that I was a new-comer in the county and "not a taxpayer" and, therefore, would do well to hold my peace. I read it to Grover and laughed heartily, asking him what he thought they meant by "fictitious." He didn't seem to think that was funny, though, and he told me gravely that he never had worked for an editor who wouldn't "give back just as good as he got." I told him not to worry and that night wrote a humorous editorial, pointing out, as Mark Twain had said, that the rumor of my death had been greatly exaggerated.

The next day was publication day. Grover didn't appear until after lunch, and his eyes were sunken and his cheeks so pale that the whiskers stood out very black, despite the leathery texture of his skin.

I told him it didn't matter if the paper failed to appear on schedule. But he insisted on starting to set my editorial.

A couple of hours later I came from the back room and surprised him rubbing his eyes furiously while his stick lay on the floor, a pitiful handful of type scattered around it.

"Dratted type's too small," he mumbled gruffly. "Can't seem to see it today."

"Mr Grover," I begged, "please go on home."

But he straightened up and managed to roll one of his homemade cigarettes. "You know, Mr Andrews, 'pears to me like I could make a sight more speed if you'd let me set this here editorial in fo'teen point."

It was like seeing the spirit of a man standing up out of the ribbons of his flesh, and I knew that the worst injury I could do him would be to keep insisting he wasn't fit to work.

Somehow he managed to get the editorial set in the larger type, and of course I couldn't fail to match his efforts as best I could. So once again our paper appeared on time.

And then there was Kay Bolton. I had been avoiding her eyes since the night of the dance. But

after supper one evening she called to me from the porch swing, and when I sat beside her, she said, "I know you're embarrassed, but I wish you would forget it. It was my mistake, not yours, don't you see?"

That made me feel more guilty than ever. "I wish I *did* feel differently about you," I told her. "Because I think you're one of the most straightforward girls I've ever known."

"Yes, I know," she said, a little flatly, and she pushed hard at the swing.

In a moment, though, she managed to laugh. And, as I questioned her, she fell to talking of herself. She had been the star of the high-school play, and once she had been offered a secretarial job in Washington, which her father wouldn't let her accept because she was needed in the store. She wanted desperately to get away from Carterville, as did most of the other girls in the town, she told me. "But it's the old story," she said. "We're all waiting for some traveling salesman to come along and lure us to the sinful city. Only I never see any traveling salesmen around here."

I told her that if she had another job offered her, she ought to take it, despite her father's pro-

test, and as I rose from the swing, she embarrassed me again by saying, "You don't know what this summer has meant to all of us!"

Finally there was Abe Stein. He came into the shop one day while I was trying to repair the proof press.

"Well, hello," I said. "What d' you know about this contraption?"

He was as intense as ever. "I came in to pay for that ad you ran. How much is it?"

"Nothing," I told him. "It was only an experiment."

"Nevertheless," he said, as though he had planned his words, "I sold ten dresses that week at a dollar and a half each. Your legitimate commission would be ten per cent." He unclasped an old-fashioned change purse and handed me a dollar and a half.

"All right," I laughed, and I took the money rather than see him again become excited and make a scene.

He watched me tinkering with the press for a moment. "I'm leaving town, you know."

"Is that so?" I said, not greatly interested.

Then he flamed out again, as I had feared he

would. "Yes, I'm telling this whole town to go to hell. I've sold out my store, and now I'm going so far away I'll never hear of Carterville!"

"What will you do?" I asked him.

"I don't know, but whatever it is, there 'll be people to appreciate it instead of staring at me like I was a freak!" He went, trembling, from the shop.

"Good luck," I called on an impulse, but he didn't seem to hear me. Watching his narrow back, I reflected that at least I wouldn't be leaving Carterville in that spirit, thank heaven.

And now the story is almost told, and I am not sorry, for it has hurt more in the telling than the living, I think.

I hadn't said anything to Grover, but I knew he understood this was to be my last week. There had been a letter from Bixby asking me to vacate. Soliciting ads was almost impossible, since without a car I had to hitchhike thirty-five miles to Fredericksburg and back to call on the merchants.

I had accepted the inevitable, and yet—there remained a certain reluctance to leave what had become a part of myself. I hadn't told Mrs Bolton

I was going away, and on Thursday morning she rapped at my door once again, calling, "Six o'clock, Mr Andrews."

I found Grover already at the shop, cigarette hanging from his lip as his deft fingers darted among the boxes of type.

"Good morning, Mr Grover. A bit chilly, eh?"

"Mornin', sir."

I walked into the back room and looked around. At least no one could say I hadn't been orderly. The mess of loose type which had littered the stone when I arrived was back in the cases now. The boxes and piles of junk had been burned, the floor swept.

A bit of charred newspaper that had fallen from the stove scraped across the cement, and I picked it up. As I dropped it back in the stove, old man Grover spoke at my elbow: "Course it's none o' my business, Mr Andrews, but I been thinkin'. If it 'd help you any, I reckon I could take half-salary for a while. Now that Virgie's gone, I guess m' wife and I could get along on six dollars a week."

As in Link's case, I had to speak brusquely or not at all. "Thanks, Mr Grover, but I don't know where I'd get six dollars even."

He studied me a moment, peering through his smudgy spectacles. "You know, I can't see where there's any sense in you stayin' here at that. You're young yet. You can do lots of things."

"Yes, I think so, too," I told him. I sat at my desk and wrote the necessary business letters:

Dear Sir: Please discontinue our weekly shipment of newsprint, as I am going out of the business.

When I had done everything I could think of, I decided to take a walk. Outside, the air was dry and rare, fall air. Passing through the town, I said "hello" to a boy raking leaves. "When does school open?" I asked, and he said, "They don't know yet. Never, I hope." He grinned.

I took the old back road and crossed the bridge where Doris and I had sat on the railing one night. I tried not to think of that. There was something else on my mind, something still to be done, it seemed, but I couldn't think of what it was.

As I walked, I kept noticing the red shading of the leaves, the brown tones of the whole countryside, the gentle haze over the land that seemed to denote a pause—a time of year when borning and

dying alike had ceased for just a little while. Words I almost had forgotten since leaving New York began to take shape, and the old pattern, the old marching rhythm of words swept upon me once more.

Ah, yes, my last editorial! And I laughed aloud and razzed myself for a sentimental fool. But when I came to the smooth cement platform of the old mill, I found the stub of a pencil and a half-sheet of copy paper and began to scribble what I really was thinking:

ONE MORE ONSLAUGHT

Down over the rolling hills and grassy slopes of the Piedmont the mantle of fall is dropping gently these days. In the evening wood smoke is in the air, and the moon comes up round and yellow through the mist; the rooster crows clearly across the browning field; the leaf dies in a final burst of glory and falls to earth.

What does it all mean to the farmer as he plods homeward at sunset, noticing, perhaps subconsciously, the turn of the season?

Harvest time, to be sure. But, more than that,

there is a sense of kinship to the earth that cannot fail to touch the imagination of man at springtime and in the fall.

At these seasons Nature calls herself to our attention. In the painting of a leaf—a new color for each new day—she fairly shouts, “Look at me, look at me! I am showing you all my genius!”

And man, though he be absorbed in his own concerns, must be a dullard indeed if he cannot look and marvel and draw a conclusion.

Life goes on, year after year, century after century. What was the sere leaf on the bow in autumn is the freshest of new soft soil in the spring. Nature never tires of stooping to build up again, and neither should man.

Fortunately, nothing is constant on the earth. Joy follows sorrow and sorrow joy as surely as the clear mountain stream freezes and thaws.

A fatalist’s attitude? Well, no, not if one remembers that Nature does not surrender in winter but gathers her strength and organizes her forces for the rush and the bloom of *a new onslaught* in spring!

We made no effort to go to press that night. But in the morning old man Grover and I lifted the last form for the last time, and I heaved the flywheel of the monster while he threw the switch, and once more life pulsed in the back room of a shack in Virginia.

We had finished with the press by noon, and then, while Grover folded the papers, I sat down to address them and make up the bundles for mailing. I had done it so often that I scarcely needed the mailing list—Mrs Felix Abbott, Mrs Grace Abner, Miss Annie Alcott, and so on.

Finally I came to the part of the task that I liked the best, addressing the bundles for the various towns. They had such euphonious names—Catlett, Calverton, Bealeton, Midland, Brandy, Warrenton, Culpeper, Noblestown. I called them off aloud as I wrote them, as a train announcer might. And I couldn't help wondering if Miss Annie Alcott, of Bealeton, would be reading my editorial and perhaps . . . Oh, well . . .

Finally there didn't seem to be anything else to do. I took one of the fresh papers and clipped it on top of the file on the wall. There were twelve of them on the file now, and I said to old man Grover, "Maybe the next guy will appreciate these."

He didn't speak as I slipped on my sweater and collected my pipe and a few other odds and ends. He didn't watch me.

Then I thought of something else. "By the way, Mr Grover, I've sent out bills for the month with instructions that they be made payable to you. There 'll be around forty dollars, if all of them pay. But you'll be lucky to collect half that," I laughed.

"If you send me your address, I'll see that you get the money, every cent," the old printer said.

"No, I mean I want you to have the money," I explained, and we had a brief argument over that. "You treated me square, and now I'm goin' to treat you square," the old man kept insisting. Finally I let him have his way, knowing that he wouldn't know my whereabouts and hoping he finally would use the money himself.

Once more I went into the back room and looked at the old press. But I was afraid to stand there too long. I fumbled around in the desk a few minutes more, telling myself I was making sure I hadn't forgotten anything. There was a little brass make-up rule lying on the desk. It had been worn smooth and shiny during the months I had used it. When Grover wasn't looking, I slipped it in my pocket.

"Well . . ." I said.

At the door we shook hands. "I'll send you that money just as soon as I collect it," Grover repeated.

"All right," I said, "and thanks. Thanks for everything."

He blinked in the sun. "Maybe you'll be comin' back someday."

"Maybe I will," I agreed. "Good-by, Mr Grover."

As I hurried across the field, I knew he was standing in the doorway slowly rolling a cigarette. I didn't turn to look, but I could see him there just the same.

At the Boltons' I hastily threw what clothes I had left into my suitcase. They only half filled it, and I stuffed the twelve issues of the *Piedmont Herald* on top. At least, I thought, I had run a newspaper for three months on less than a hundred and fifty dollars. Now I had these to show for it.

I knew I couldn't leave without saying good-by to Mrs Bolton, but I had kept putting it off. I found her in the kitchen, washing clothes. She wore the same old blue dress which she had lived in ever since I first saw her. When she saw my suit-

case, her face fell. But immediately that smile—the smile through pain which I had not wanted to see again—was forced into her face, and she said, “Why, then, I’m sure it’s all for the best, isn’t it?”

“Of course,” I said.

“Well, I just know everything will be all right for you. I just *know* it.”

“Thank you. Good-by, Mrs Bolton.” I walked through the town, feeling, as always, the eyes of the loungers in front of the produce exchange. I thought for a moment of stopping to see Mayor Bixby, but it seemed pointless. I owed him nothing. He owed me nothing.

I had passed the post office when I remembered I hadn’t called for the mail that morning. I went back and twirled the combination lock on the box. There were the usual handouts, and I replaced them—they weren’t intended for me any longer. There was, too, a letter from Link, which I put in my pocket unopened.

At the highway I set my suitcase on the ground and waited for a lift. I counted the money I had left—two dollars and sixty-five cents. A chill little wind rattled a newspaper lying in the ditch. Half a dozen cars passed me without slowing.

Finally a sedan with a New York license pulled to a halt several yards beyond me. I ran along the side of the road and clambered into the front seat.

"Where you bound, buddy?" The driver's accent was familiar.

"New York," I said, and he said, "Yer in luck, buddy. That's where I'm headed for."

As the car gathered speed passing the new high school, I looked back. There was the Baptist church steeple, and there across the fields was the squatty little building that I used to call mine.

"Good-by, Carterville," I said softly.

"What?" the driver said.

"Nothing," I said. There was still light enough to read by, and I opened Link's letter:

Dear Jimson: It certainly felt good to get back to civilization, and what do you think, I got a job right away! I'm driving a taxi now, and it pays good money, I can tell you. The company I'm with is looking for some more drivers, and I've already spoken to the head man about you. So try and get here as soon as you can.

"You going to look for a job in New York?" the driver was saying.

"Yes, I suppose so," I said. I was watching twilight suffusing the fields with a delicate violet. I was thinking of how a little cemetery in the field would look at this time of evening. Faintly behind us I heard the local begin to blow for Carterville, "To-oooo, tuh-wo-ooo, tuh-wo-oooo," a plaintive call.

"I hear times are tough up there," the driver said.

"Yes, well, I don't know." The wind fluttered the letter in my hands. It was too dark to read any more. "When do you expect to get there?" I asked.

"Oh, I'll drive all night and be there in the morning. I got a big deal on tomorrow."

"Swell," I said, and my voice leaped out surprisingly, "Let 'er roll!"

THE END

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